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Studia Islamica, 1998/2 (mars) 87

Ibn Taymiyyah and the Satanic verses

In memory of Marsden Jones

In Alexandria, it has been said that the only persons incapable of a sin are those who have already committed it and repented; to be free of an error, let us add, it is well to have professed it.

Jorge Luis Borges, *Averroes' Search*(1)

1. *Introduction*

This article(2) examines the opinions of the great medieval Muslim thinker Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah (661/1262-728/1328) on the Satanic verses incident, reported to have occurred in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad.(3) Both Ibn Taymiyyah and the Satanic verses have acquired a particular significance at the end of the 14-15th/20th century, the Satanic verses as a result of the furore attending the publication of the novel of that name, and Ibn Taymiyyah because of the primacy accorded his writings by several pre-modern and modern Islamic movements,

(1)Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths. Selected Stories and Other Writings*, New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1964, p. 153.

(2)This article is based on a section of the fourth chapter of my PhD dissertation entitled "The Problem of the Satanic verses and the Formation of Islamic Orthodoxy", to be completed at Princeton University in August 1998. Many of the broader historical issues raised in the article will be found treated there in greater detail. A nascent version of this article was presented at the Middle East Studies Association conference in Washington, D.C., in December 1995. I should like to thank Michael Cook and Dana al-Sajdi for their valuable criticisms of an earlier draft.

(3)Although there has been considerable research on Ibn Taymiyyah, to the best of my knowledge there has been no study of his views on the Satanic verses.

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notably the Wahhābīs, Salafīs and Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*). Perhaps as a result of the way Ibn Taymiyyah is invoked today in the Islamic world, there is a tendency to characterise him a little too readily and a-historically as "traditionalist" or "orthodox", with insufficient consideration of the applicability in medieval history of the modern meaning of these terms, or of the degree of congruence between the selective modern invocations of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings and the larger body of his often original ideas and methods.(4) Similarly, the long debate conducted by Muslim scholars over the Satanic verses incident has not been studied in terms of the historical development of Islamic thought. This debate, resolved today in the rejection of the historicity of the Satanic verses incident, is important not only for what it tells us about changing Muslim concepts of the Prophet Muḥammad, but also for the historical process of the formation of Islamic orthodoxy.(5) Ibn Taymiyyah's writings on the Satanic verses thus give us occasion to examine a striking instance of the synthetic originality of his ideas and methods and, at the same time, to locate them in the history of Muslim attitudes towards the Satanic verses incident. This, in turn, has implications for our understanding of the historical constitution of orthodoxy in Islam.

(4)For a summary presentation of Ibn Taymiyyah's influence down the centuries, see Henri Laoust, "L'influence d'Ibn-Taymiyyah", in Alford T. Welch and Pierre Cachia (editors), *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979, p. 15-33. Laoust's assessment, that "Ibn Taymiyya remains today, with al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), one of the writers who have had the greatest influence on contemporary Islam, particularly in Sunnī circles", is a fair one (see his article on "Ibn Taymiyya" in *EI2*). The question of the specific content of that influence, however, still remains to be answered. Emmanuel Sivan has discussed the use made of Ibn Taymiyyah by 14-15th/20th century political Islamists: Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam, Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 96-104. Johannes J.G. Jansen, a scholar of modern "fundamentalism", has written: "Two figures have dominated the history of Islam in the twentieth century: Gamal al-Din al-Afghani and Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah...". While this is something of an overstatement, it reflects the view of the discourse which Jansen studies (see Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 26).

(5)By "Islamic orthodoxy", I mean a concept of Islam in which beliefs or methods of inquiry are invested by their proponents with exclusive authority and validity such that any variant belief arising from any variant method of inquiry is regarded as invalid and illegitimate. When doctrinal orthodoxy is invested with institutional authority, the adherent of a variant and hence unorthodox belief becomes subject to legal sanction.

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2. The Satanic verses incident

The Satanic verses incident, known in the Islamic literature as the *qiṣṣat al-gharānīq* (Story of the Cranes), is the name given to the occasion on which the Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have mistaken words of Satanic suggestion for Divine Revelation. The accounts of the incident state that, when under persecution by Quraysh in the pre-Hijrah phase of his mission, Muḥammad was eager to be reconciled with Quraysh and accordingly hoped to receive a Divine Revelation that would effect this. At this time, Sūrat al-Najm was revealed to the Prophet who recited it before an assembly of Quraysh in the Ka'bah. The nineteenth verse of Sūrat al-Najm contains a reference to the pagan goddesses of Quraysh: "And have you considered what it is you are worshipping in al-Lāt, al-'Uzza and Manāt, the third, the other?" When Muḥammad reached the end of this verse, Satan cast into his mind two verses praising the deities and according them a place in his doctrine: "Indeed, they are as high-flying cranes! And, indeed, their intercession (with God) is hoped for! ".(6) The Prophet mistook these Satanic verses for the Word of God and recited them. Quraysh were greatly pleased by the Prophet's praising their deities and when he reached the final verse of Sūrat al-Najm, "Prostrate yourself before Allah and worship Him!", they prostrated themselves along with the Muslims, and the persecution of the Prophet and his followers was halted. Later, however, Muḥammad was visited by the angel Gabriel, who informed him that the verses he had taken to be a part of the Quran were, in fact, from Satan. Gabriel then revealed to the Prophet the following verses from Sūrat al-Ḥajj, nullifying the Satanic interpolation and explaining the Divine rationale behind what had taken place: "We have not sent before you a Messenger or a Prophet but that when he recited/desired [*tamanna*], Satan cast something into his recitation/desire [*umniyyati-hi*], but God annuls that which Satan casts and then establishes His Signs clearly - and God is All-Knowing, All-Wise - to make what Satan casts a trial for those in whose hearts is sickness and those whose hearts are hardened - for indeed the wrong-doers are in far dissension - and to teach those who have been endowed with knowledge that this is the Truth from your Lord, that they believe in it and humble their hearts to Him, for God guides those who believe to

(6)"*inna-hā 'l-gharānīq al-'ula wa inna shafā'ata-hā la-turtaja*". The wording of the Satanic verses varies between the different accounts.

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a straight path".(7) Muḥammad recanted the Satanic verses, and the persecution by Quraysh resumed.

The Satanic verses incident is narrated in numerous reports (between 18 and 25, depending on how one reckons an independent *riwāyah*) scattered in the *sīrah nabawiyyah* and *tafsīr* literature originating in the first two centuries of Islam. The indications are that the incident formed a fairly standard element in the historical memory of the early Muslim community regarding the life of its founder.(8) From about the mid-2nd/8th century onwards, however, with the rise of the Ḥadīth movement on the one hand and the development of systematic theology on the other, the historical memory of the early community was subjected to a re-evaluation on the basis of the criteria of new doctrines and methodologies of inquiry.

Among the doctrines that emerged from the mid-2nd/8th century onwards was that of *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'*, literally "the protection of the Prophets", meaning God's Protection of them from sin and error. The idea of the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets, which seems to have originated among the Shīah, was embraced as a doctrinal principle in some form or another by almost every Muslim sect and theological or legal school. With the spread of the concept that Muḥammad constituted the model personality whose normative conduct (*sunnah*), as recorded in the Ḥadīth, was to be imitated by every Muslim, the idea that he should not sin must have appeared both logical and persuasive. Also, with the establishment of the legal principle that the Muslim community itself was protected from agreement upon error in the interpretation of Divine Law, it was hardly possible for the exemplar of the Law to be allowed to err himself.(9)

(7)"*wa mā arsalnā min qabli-ka min rasūlin wā la nabiyyin illā idhā tamanna alqa 'l-shayṭānu fī umniyyati-hi fa-yansakhu 'llāhu mā yulqī 'l-shayṭānu thumma yuḥkimu 'llāhu āyāti-hi wa 'llāhu 'alīmun ḥakīm/ li-yaj'ala mā yulqī 'l-shayṭānu fitnatan li-'l-ladhīna fī qulūbi-him maraḍun wa 'l-qāsiyati qulūbu-hum wa inna 'l-ẓālimīna la-fī shiqāqin ba'id/ wa li-ya'lama 'l-ladhīna ūtū 'l-'ilma anna-hu 'l-ḥaqqu min rabbi-ka fa- yu'minū bi-hi fa-tukhbitu la-hu qulūbu-hum wa inna 'llāha la-hādi 'l-ladhīna āmanū ila ṣirāṭin mustaqīm*"; Quran 22: 52-54.

(8)That the incident is a standard element in the early Muslim historical memory does not, of course, necessarily mean that it constitutes historical fact. For an analysis of the texts of the narratives and their chains of transmission, see Chapter 1 of my PhD dissertation.

(9)Annemarie Schimmel has made the point well: "The absolute obedience owed to the Prophet is meaningful only if Muhammad was free from any faults and could thus constitute an immaculate model for even the most insignificant details of life"; *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p. 59.

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The concept of *'iṣmah* is generally translated as meaning "infallibility", "immunity" or "impeccability". This is not entirely incorrect: *'iṣmah* in the sense of infallibility or inpeccability has been a fundamental principle of Shī ī thought since the 2nd/8th century, and is also the sense in which the concept is understood today by Sunnī Muslim orthodoxy.([10]) But, as we shall see when discussing Ibn Taymiyyah's writings on the Satanic verses, *'iṣmah* has not always been understood by Sunnī scholars as connoting infallibility. Rather, the efficacy of Protection is contingent upon how *'iṣmah* is conceived of within a particular theology. While infallibility is indeed one possible *effect* of *'iṣmah*, a Prophet's being *maṣūm* (Protected) in regard to an act or category of acts did not necessarily imply that he did not sin or err in the performance of those acts. In understanding *ismah* as infallibility, modern scholarship is perhaps guilty of retrojecting a formulation of later Islamic orthodoxy back onto a more variegated and heterodox age. While modern scholars have long recognized that the understanding of *'iṣmah* varied from *madhhab* to *madhhab*, the tendency has been to view these differences as affecting only the periods of a Prophet's life and the categories of sin and error to which his infallibility or immunity applied. Hence, the disagreements over *'iṣmah* have generally been understood as having dealt with whether Prophets were *ma'ṣūm* from birth or only after receiving their call from God; and whether from all or some of the following transgressions: major sins (*al-kabā'ir*), minor sins (*al-ṣaghā'ir*), inadvertent error (*sahw*) forgetfulness (*nisyān*) and lapses (*zallāt*). For this reason, while it is correctly recognized that all schools were agreed that Prophets were *maṣūm* in the communication of Divine Revelation,([11]) the full implications of this statement have not been fully appreciated. In bringing to light Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'*, this study will show that the medieval disagreements over *'iṣmah* went well beyond what has been previously documented and that, for many medieval scholars, including Ibn Taymiyyah, *'iṣmah* did not mean infallibility, immunity or impeccability.

The medieval proponents of *'iṣmah* were confronted with several allusions to Prophetic fallibility in the Quran, and with the numerous accounts of Prophetic error contained in the early *sīrah* and *tafsīr* li-

(10)For a contemporary Sunnī presentation of *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'* written as a prescriptive orthodox statement by a member of the High Council of Islamic Affairs in Egypt, see Muḥammad Zakī Ibrāhīm, *'Iṣmat al-nabī*, Cairo: Dār al-Naṣr, (4th edition) 1989.

(11)See the article on "*'Iṣma*" by Wilferd Madelung in *EI2* where agreement on *'iṣmah* in the transmission of Revelation emerges as the common minimal position.

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terature. The image of Muḥammad contained in the accounts of the Satanic verses - that of a Prophet who fell victim to Satan during the transmission of Divine Revelation and compromised the doctrine of the fundamental unity of God - proved particularly problematic for many of the scholars who were engaged in formulating authoritative Islamic doctrine on the bases of theology and Hadith during the 3rd-7th /9th-13th centuries. The response of these scholars was to reject the historicity of the Satanic verses incident on the basis of two fundamental principles. First, the incident contradicted the theological principle of infallibility in the transmission of Divine Revelation, thereby calling into question the integrity of the text of Quran. Second, the *isnāds* (chains of transmitters) of the reports which narrated the incident were insufficient in Ḥadīth methodology for the narratives to be validated as true. On these grounds, either the incident was rejected out of hand, or the narrative re-figured in such in way as to reconcile the incident with the doctrine of *'iṣmah*. In the second case, while it would be accepted that some such incident did indeed take place, instead of saying that the Prophet uttered the Satanic verses - which was the crucial and offensive narrative element for the proponents of Prophetic infallibility - the narrative was adjusted to mean that it was Satan or some of the Unbelievers who spoke the verses while imitating the Prophet's voice. None of the early reports, it should be said, present the incident in this way. This process of interpretative rehabilitation of the problematic texts to doctrinally permissible parameters was termed *ta'wīl*.[12]

That these arguments eventually proved successful is clear from the unanimous position adopted by 14-15th/20th century *'ulamā'* on the Satanic verses, which is precisely to deny the historicity of the incident as found in the early sources on the bases of the theological principle of *'iṣmah* and the methodological principle of *isnād*-criticism. These principles have come, today, to constitute two fundamental elements in the epistemology of modern Islamic orthodoxy on the twin bases of which the rejection of the Satanic verses incident has assumed the status of irrecusable doctrine, deviation from which calls into question the soundness of a Muslim's beliefs. The fact of this may be seen in a seminar convened on 3 May 1966 by the Cairo journal *Liwā' al-Islām*

(12)For the use of *ta'wīl* as the term for this process, and its application to the Satanic verses, see Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d.852/1505), *al-Kāfī al-shāfī fī takhrīj aḥādīthi 'l-Kashshāf li-'l-Zamakhsharī*, published (with separate pagination) as an appendix to Vol. 4 of Jār Allāh Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1142), *al-Kashshāf an ḥaqā'iqi 'l-tanzīl*, Beirut: Dār al-Marifah, n.d., p. 114.

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which was devoted to the question of the Satanic verses and attended by several of the prominent Egyptian religious scholars of the day. After forcefully rejecting the historicity of the incident on the bases of *ismah* and *isnāds*, the participants concluded: "The *qiṣṣat al-gharānīq* is a fabricated tale which heretics [*al-zanādiqah*] have concocted against the great Quran".([13]) One of the scholars in attendance suggested that published editions of medieval Islamic works be reviewed and purged of any mention of the incident.([14])

In the medieval period, however, it seems that the authority of these two principles was not as yet established; many Sunnī scholars, especially those whose primary intellectual concerns were non-theological and non- legal, either accepted or remained indifferent to the historicity of the Satanic verses.([15]) Moreover, many of them dealt with the incident without any reference to the issues of *'iṣmah* or *isnāds*.([16]) Nonetheless, by the century immediately preceding the birth of Ibn Taymiyyah, rejection of the incident was widespread. Two of the most prominent scholars of the 6th/12th century, the Andalusian Mālikī jurist al-Qāḍī Iyāḍ al-Yaḥsubī (d. 544/1149) and the Persian Shāfi'ī theologian and jurist Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) wrote detailed and highly influential refutations of the Satanic verses incident on the bases of *'aql* (reason: that is, the *'iṣmah* argument) and *naql* (transmission: the *isnād* argument). Al-Rāzī, who wrote a work on *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'* dedicated to explaining away, through *ta'wīl*, the allusions to Prophetic sin in the Quran, begins the *'aql* section of his discussion of Quran 22:52 in the *Tafsīr al-kabīr* with the statement: "Whoever accepts that the Prophet praised idols is guilty of *kufr* (Unbelief)"; while al-Qāḍī Iyāḍ, whose famous *al-shifā'* is a demonstration of the superhuman qualities of Muḥammad, fundamental among them his impeccability, cites with approbation the remark of the 4th/10th century Mālikī scholar Bakr. b. Muḥammad b. Alā' al-Qushayrī (d. 344/955) characterising the *tafsīr* scholars who transmitted the incident as "heretics" (*ahl al-ahwā'*) and

(13)See "*Nadwat Liwā' al-Islām: qiṣṣat al- gharānīq*", *Liwā' al-Islām*, 20/6 (Safar 1386/May 1966), p. 373-386, and 20/7 (Rabī' al-Awwal 1386/June 1966), p. 430-442, at p. 442.

(14)See *Liwā' al-Islām* 20/7, p. 437.

(15)This statement does not apply to the Shī'ah for whom the doctrine of *'iṣmah* was firmly established as a fundamental tenet from the 2nd/8th century and who have consistently rejected the Satanic verses incident since that time. This paper deals only with the development of Sunnī thought.

(16)See, for example, the commentary on Quran 22: 52 by Abu l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), *al-Nukat wa 'l-'uyūn* (edited by al-Sayyid b. 'Abd al-Maqṣūd b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992, 4: 34-36.

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those who accept its historicity as "apostates" (*mulḥidūn*).([17]) The leading 5th/11th and 6th/12th century personalities of Ibn Taymiyyah's own Ḥanbal'ī *madhhab*, 'Alī Ibn 'Aqīl al-Baghdādī (d. 513/1119) and Abū 'l-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), both rejected the incident, explaining it away by *ta'wīl*.([18]) Ibn al-Jawzī adduced the incident as an example of the "incredible stories and corrupt explanations" resorted to by the Persians (*al-aājim*) among the Quran commentators.([19]) It is safe to say that by Ibn Taymiyyah's time, denial of the historicity of the Satanic verses incident had become the majoritarian position among Muslim scholars and attempts were being made to assert this position as irrecusable orthodoxy.

3. Ibn Taymiyyah

Ibn Taymiyyah's opinions on the Satanic verses are scattered throughout his vast *œuvre*. As he did not devote a monograph to the *qiṣṣat al-gharānīq* as such, his presentations of the issue tend to be framed in terms of the particular context of the subject of the *risālah* or *fatwa* in which he refers to the incident. In no single discourse on the incident does Ibn Taymiyyah give a full exposition of the bases of his understanding of the Satanic verses. I have therefore sought to reconstruct Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses by collating and integrating his several always consistent but incomplete commentaries. His most prolonged treatment of the subject appears in what one of his earliest bibliographers, Ibn Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1144), calls the *Kalām*

(17)See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Bahiyyah al-Miṣriyyah, n.d., 23: 48-55, especially p. 50-51; also al-Rāzī, *al-Arba'īn fī uṣūli 'l-dīn* (edited by Muḥammad Ḥijāzī), Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1986, p. 115-176, especially p. 117 and p. 162-165; also al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-anbiyā'* (edited by Muḥammad Ḥijāzī), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1981, p. 121-127; and al-Qāḍī Iyāḍ, *al-Shifā' bi-ta'rīf ḥuqūqi 'l-muṣṭafa* (edited by Muḥammad Amīn Qurrah 'Alī *et al*), Damascus: Dar al-Wafā', 1972, 2: 288-310, especially p. 290.

(18)Ibn 'Aqīl's reported position is that Satan uttered the verses while imitating the Prophet's voice; see Taqī al-Dīn Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm Ibn Muḥammad b. Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī al-Ḥanbalī (d. 803/1401), *al-Isti'ādhah bi-'llāhi min al-shayṭān al-rajīm*, Cairo: 1311/1893, p. 118; and the same author's *Maṣā'ib al- insān min makā'id al-shayṭān* (edited by 'Alī Rahmī), Cairo: Dar al-Marjān, 1980, p. 127. Ibn al-Jawzī attributed the utterance to "some Satanic elements" [*baḍ al- shayāṭīn*]"; see his *al-Wafā' bi-aḥwāli 'l-muṣṭafa*, Riyad: al-Mu'assasah al-Saīdiyyah, 1976, 1: 309-310.

(19)For Ibn al-Jawzī's dim view of those who accepted the Prophet's uttering the verses, see his *Kitāb al-quṣṣās wa 'l-mudhakkirīn* (edited by Merlin L. Swartz), Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1971, p. 102 (p. 182-183 of the translation).

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'ala da 'wat Dhī 'l-Nūn.([20]) This is a lengthy commentary on Quran 21: 87, being the cry of the Prophet Yūnus to God from inside the belly of the great fish that had swallowed him: "There is no God but You! Glory be to You! Truly, I am from among the wrongdoers!"([21]) The following is the discussion of the Satanic verses:([22])

> [A] The principle established by the agreement of the Community [*bi-'ttifaqi 'l-ummah*] is that the Prophets (God's Peace be upon them!) are Protected [*ma 'ṣūmūm*] in that which they convey from God (Glory be to Him!) and in imparting his Messages. And it is by this firmly established Protection [*al-'iṣmah*] of the Prophets that the purpose of Prophethood [*al-nubuwwah*] and Messengership [*al-risālah*] is obtained. A Prophet is someone who conveys communications from God and a Messenger is someone sent by God with a mission [*al-ladhī arsala-hu 'llāhu*]; and while every Messenger is a Prophet not every Prophet is a Messenger. Protection in regard to that which they impart from God

(20)Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī Ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *al-'Uqūd al-durriyyah min manāqib Shaykhi 'l-Islām Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah* (edited by Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1975, p. 51. The *Kalām 'ala da'wat Dhī 'l-Nūn* (hereafter *KDN*) was published within the 5-volume *Kitāb majmū'at fatāwa Shaykhi 'l- Islām Taqī-al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī* (edited by Ismāīl b. al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Khāṭīb al-Ḥasanī al-Salafī al-Isirdī al-Azharī), Cairo: Maṭbaat Kurdistān al-'Ilmiyyah, 1326/1908, (hereafter *MFC*), 2: 256-303 (the reference to the Satanic verses is at p. 282-283); and again, with some textual variances, in the 35-volume *Majmū' fatāwa Shaykhi 'l-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah* (edited by 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Qāsim al-'Āṣimi al-Najdī al-Ḥanbalī), Riyad: Maṭābi' al-Riyāḍ, 1381-86/1962-66, (hereafter *MFR*), 10: 237-337 (the reference is at p. 291-293) (reprinted with 2 volumes of indexes; Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1980). For Ibn Taymiyyah's other references to the question of the Satanic verses see his commentary on Quran 12: 110 in *MFR* 15: 175-195 (at p. 190-92); the discussion of whether *wuḍū'* is required for *sajdat al-tilāwah wa 'l-shukr* in *MFR* 21: 277-285 (at p. 281-282 = *MFC* 2: 51-52); the discussion on *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'* in the *Minhāj al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah fī naqṣ kalāmi 'l-shī'ah al-qadariyyah* (edited by Muḥammad Rashād Sālim), Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1962, (hereafter *MS*), 2: 308-340 (at p. 322) and 1: 330-331; the discussion on the *ṣidq* (Veracity) of the Prophets in *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ* (edited by 'Alī b. Ḥasan b. Nāṣir *et al*), Riyad: Dār al-'Āṣimah, (hereafter *JṢ*), 2: 20-41 (at p. 35-37); the *Risālah fi 'l-tawbah*, in Jāmi *al-rasā'il* (edited by Muḥammad Rashād Sālim), Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1969, (hereafter *RT/JR*), 1: 219-227 (at p. 263); and the introduction to the *'Ilm al-ḥadīth* (edited by Mūsa Muḥammad 'Alī), Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1984, (hereafter *IḤ*), p. 54 (=MFR 18:7).

(21)"*lā ilāha illā anta subḥāna-ka innī kuntu min al-ẓālimīn*".The Quran calls Yūnus "Dhū 'l-Nūn", al-Nūn being the eponymous fish.

(22)To the best of my knowledge, virtually all of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings cited in this study have not previously been analyzed, for which reason it may prove instructive to present them in full. To facilitate cross-referencing, I am designating each translated extract with a letter of the alphabet in square brackets.

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is firmly established and the Muslims are agreed that no error may come to lodge therein [*la yastaqirru fī dhālika khaṭa'*].

But : Can something issue forth [*hal yaṣduru*] which God then corrects, such that God removes that which Satan casts and establishes His Signs clearly? There are two opinions in regard to this and the Quran is in agreement with the one that has been transmitted from the early Muslims [*al-salaf*]. Those later Muslims [*al-muta'akhkhirūn*] who forbid this position attack what has been transmitted about the Prophet uttering the additional words, "Indeed, they are as high-flying cranes! And, indeed, their intercession is hoped for!", in Sūrat al-Najm, saying that the transmission of the accounts is not established as reliable. Those of them who recognize that the transmission is reliable say : "Satan cast this into their hearing but the Prophet (God's Peace and Preservation be upon him!) did not utter it" ; but the question remains unresolved in this interpretation too,(23) so they also say in regard to God's words, "*illā idhā tamanna alqa 'l-shayṭānu fī umniyyati-hi*", that this refers to inner thoughts [*ḥadīth al-nafs*].

Those who affirm what has been transmitted from the early Muslims, say : This has been reliably transmitted and it is not possible to discredit it, and the Quran furnishes evidence for it by saying : "We have not sent before you a Prophet or a Messenger but that when he recited /desired, Satan cast something into his recitation, but God annuls that which Satan casts and then establishes His Signs [*āyāt*] clearly - and God is All- Knowing, All-Wise - to make what Satan casts a trial for those in whose hearts is sickness and those whose hearts are hardened - for indeed the wrong-doers are in far dissension - and to teach those who have been endowed with knowledge that this is the Truth from your Lord, that they believe in it and humble their hearts to Him, for God guides those who believe to a straight path".

They say : The reports in explanation of this verse in the books of *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* are well-known and reliable and the Quran is in agreement with these reports. For God's abrogation of what Satan casts and His establishing His Signs [*āyāt*] is precisely so as to remove what has fallen into His *āyāt* and to distinguish Truth from Falsehood so that His *āyāt* are not confused with anything else ; while the making of that which Satan cast as "a trial for those in whose hearts there is sickness and for those whose hearts are hardened" can only happen if what was cast was

(23)Ibn Taymiyyah's point here is that if Satan is capable of imitating the Prophet's voice, then he may at any time recite fabricated verses which listeners will take as having been said by the Prophet. In this situation, the integrity of the Revelation will depend not on the Protection of the Prophet but on the Protection of each and every sundry individual from being deceived by Satan in this way. This, it was argued, was a patently untenable situation.

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something external which the people heard and not something internal to the soul [*lā bāṭinan fī al-nafs*]. The trial that results from this is the kind of trial that arises from the second category of abrogation [*al-naw al-ākhar min al-naskh*] and this category of abrogation is even stronger proof of the Veracity [*ṣidq*] of the Messenger (God's Peace and Preservation be upon him!) and of how far removed he is from following false desire [*al-hawa*] than is the other category of abrogation.([24]) For, surely, if he enjoined that something be done and then enjoined something else that contradicted it, both commands being from God, and is considered as veracious [*muṣaddaq*] in that; then when he said of his own volition that the second and abrogating command was from God and that the thing that was being removed and abrogated by God was not from God, this is an even greater proof of his purposing Veracity [*i'timādi-hi li-'l-ṣidq*] and of his speaking the Truth [*qawli-hi 'l-ḥaqqa*].

This is similar to what 'Ā'ishah (may God be pleased with her!) said: "If the prophet had wanted to conceal any part of the Revelation, he would have concealed this verse: "And you concealed in yourself that which God was bringing to light and you feared the people when God is more to be feared".([25]) Do you not think the person who seeks his own aggrandizement through falsehood would want to back up everything he says, even if it is wrong? So the Prophet's proclaiming that God had established his *āyāt* and removed that which Satan cast is a yet greater proof of his striving for Veracity [*taḥarrī-hi li-'l-ṣidq*] and his innocence from lying. It is this that achieves the purpose of Messengership [*hādhā huwa 'l-maqṣūd bi-'l-risālah*],([26]) for indeed he is the Truthful, the Veracious, which is why calling him a liar is, without doubt, sheer Unbelief.([27])

Ibn Taymiyyah, then, accepted the historicity of the Satanic verses incident as something wholly consonant with Muhammad's mission, and identified this position as being that of the Quran and of the early

(24)Ibn Taymiyyah divides *naskh* into two categories: the first is the abrogation by God of one part of Revelation by another; the second is the removal by God of something interpolated into Revelation by Satan and its replacement with genuine Revelation. See the discussion of *naskh*, below.

(25)Quran 33: 37; this verse is reported to have been revealed to the Prophet when he wanted to marry Zaynab bt. Jaḥsh, the wife of his adopted son Zayd b. Ḥārithah, but did not pursue the matter because he feared the response of his followers. The argument here is that, like Quran 22: 52, the Prophet's public proclamation of this verse was potentially self-incriminating but, since it was not in his nature to suppress Divine Revelation, he proclaimed it nonetheless.

(26)Literally: "This is the purpose of Messengership". Since the purpose of Messengership is, of course, to deliver the Divine Message, what Ibn Taymiyyah must mean here is that the *ṣidq* of the Prophet is what achieves this purpose.

(27)*KDN/MFC* 2: 282-283; *KDN/MFR* 10: 290-292.

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Muslims. The essence of his argument is that the incident cannot be rejected on the basis of weak *isnāds* because the transmission of the reports is sound; and that the incident does not undermine the concept of *'iṣmah* because Prophets are not infallible in the transmission of Divine Revelation but are rather Protected only from any error coming to be permanently established in Divine Revelation. Indeed, for Ibn Taymiyyah, the incident presents the strongest evidence of Muḥammad's Veracity [ṣidq] and reliability as it demonstrates the Prophet's willingness to faithfully transmit Divine Revelation, even at the risk of incriminating himself by admitting to error.

The above passage raises a number of questions. By what criteria does Ibn Taymiyyah confirm the transmission of the reports on the incident as sound when the prevalent Ḥadīth methodology rejected them as unreliable? What is Ibn Taymiyyah's notion of *'iṣmah* if it does not extend to the Prophet being protected from Satanic suggestion in the transmission of Divine Revelation? How does Ibn Taymiyyah reconcile the notion of a fallible Prophet with the principle that Muḥammad constitutes the model personality whose conduct establishes the norms to be followed by every Muslim? How does he answer the argument that accepting the Satanic verses incident calls into question the integrity of the transmission of the Quran? What is the significance of Ibn Taymiyyah's identifying and legitimizing his position as being that of the early Muslims, the *salaf*? In sum, how does Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses fit into the larger framework of his thought and methodology? And finally, given his stature as one of the most important Muslim thinkers, especially for our own time, how has Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion on the Satanic verses been received by the guardians of his legacy in the 670 years since his death? I will attempt to address these questions in the remainder of this paper.

Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses is related to his particular understanding of several fundamental Islamic concepts: the meaning of *'iṣmah*, the nature of Prophets and specifically of their Veracity (*ṣidq*), the instrumentality of repentance (*tawbah*), the function of abrogation (*naskh*), and the criteria for Ḥadīth validation.

4. Ḥadīth methodology

It is convenient to begin with the question of the criteria by which Ibn Taymiyyah validates the transmission of the reports narrating the incident. While the *qiṣṣat al-gharānīq* is transmitted by about 30 diffe-

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rent chains, none of these meets the Ḥadīth scholars' criteria for a *ṣaḥīḥ* Ḥadīth, that is to say none of the *isnāds* goes back in an uninterrupted chain of reliable transmitters to an eyewitness. While three of the reports are reliably transmitted *marāsīl*, the rest are even more defective in one way or another.([28]) Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ summed up the attitude of prevalent Ḥadīth methodology to the state of the *isnāds* as follows: "Not one of the *mufassirūn* and *tābi'ūn* who narrated this story provided a sound *isnād* for it or traced it back to a Companion. Most of the chains of transmission are utterly weak [*ḍaīfah wāhiyah*]".([29]) This assessment and the methodology from which it derives was to become authoritative and has been restated by countless scholars. These include two 14-15th/ 20th century Ḥadīth scholars, the famous Syrian *shaykh* Nāṣir al -Dīn al-Albānī and 'Alī b. Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī al-Atharī, each of whom wrote a detailed monograph demonstrating the invalidity of the *isnāds* of the Satanic verses *riwāyahs* on the basis of Ḥadīth methodology.([30]) Thus, for Ibn Taymiyyah to have accepted the historicity of the Satanic verses incident, his criteria for assessing the validity of a historical report must have been at variance with that of the absolute majority of Ḥadīth scholars both of his time and of the modern period. While Ibn Taymiyyah does not explain his Ḥadīth methodology in any of his discussions of the Satanic verses - he says only that, "That which the *salaf* and those who follow them believe is . in accordance with what is conveyed by numerous reports [*ka-mā waradat bi-hi 'l-āthār al-muta'addidah*]'([31]) - the following passage from the *Minhāj al-sunnah* seem to be a statement of the criteria he is applying in his assessment of the reports on the incident :([32])

(28)Singular, *mursal*; meaning that while the transmitters are reliable the *isnād* stops at a *tābi'ī* (a Muslim of the second half of the 1st Islamic century) instead of going back to a *ṣaḥābī*, (Companion) of the Prophet. In all, 8 of the reports are *marāsīl*. For the opinion that 3 of these are transmitted by reliable chains see, for example, Jalāl al-Dīn *al-Suyūṭī* (d. 911/1505), *al-Durr al-manthūr fī 'l-tafsīr bi-'l-ma'thūr*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1983, 6: 64-70.

(29)Iyād, *al-Shifā'*, 2: 291.

(30)See Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Naṣb al-majānīq li-nasf qiṣṣati 'l-gharānīq*, Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1372/1952; and Alī b. Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ḥalabī al-Atharī, *Dalā'il al-taḥqīq li-ibṭāl qiṣṣati 'l-gharānīq riwāyatan wa dirāyatan*, Jeddah: Maktabat al-Ṣaḥābah, 1412/1992.

(31)*MFR* 15: 191.

(32)Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah*, Būlāq: al-Maṭba'ah al-'Āmirah, 1322/1904, (hereafter *MSB*), 4: 117. (The edited version of the *Minhāj*, cited earlier, was never completed and covers only the first 2 volumes of the Būlāq edition). This passage was quoted by Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *Risālah laṭīfah fī aḥādīth mutafarriqah ḍaīfah* (edited by Muḥammad al-'Abbās), Damascus: Dār al-Thaqāfah

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[B] Most of the reports pertaining to the occasions of Revelation [*sabab al-nuzūl*] are *mursal* and without a complete *isnad* [*laysa bi-musnadin*]. This is why Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal said: "Three sciences have no *isnād*:" - and in another version, "...have no final source [*aṣl*]:" - "*tafsīr, maghāzī* [non-legal biographical material on the life of the Prophet] and *malāḥim* [eschatological prophecies]";([33]) meaning: the reports in these sciences are *mursal* and not *musnad*. The people are in disagreement over whether *marāsīl* should be accepted or rejected. The best opinion is as follows. If it is known of a *tābiī* that he would only have related a *mursal* from someone reliable, then his projection of the report back to a *ṣaḥābī* is accepted [*qubila irsālu-hu*]. If it is known of a *tābiī* that the source of his *mursal* might be someone reliable or unreliable, then for the purposes of the assessment of *riwāyahs*, the source onto whom he is projecting the report is assumed to be someone whose reputation cannot be established and his *mursals* are regarded as stopping at the *tābiī* [*mawqūf*]. Those *marāsīl* which contradict what has been related by reliable transmitters are rejected outright. If a *mursal* is transmitted by two chains, and each of the two transmitters (at each stage of each chain) transmitted the report from a different authority to that of the other transmitter,([34]) then this indicates that the report is truthful [*hādhā yadullu 'ala ṣidqi-hi*] as it is unimaginable in common sense that reports transmitted in this way will agree with each other in error or be the result of deliberate falsification [*la-yutaṣawwaru fī 'l-'ādati tamāthulu 'l-khaṭa' fī-hi wa ta'ammudu 'l-kidhb*]. A report is undermined either by deliberate falsification or by error and if it is known that two transmitters have not colluded, then common sense precludes these two from (transmitting) similar falsehoods, whether deliberately or accidentally.

This criterion is further elaborated by Ibn Taymiyyah in the *Muqaddimah fī uṣūli 'l- tafsīr*:([35])

[C] If *marāsīl* are transmitted by a number of chains of transmitters, and these reports are free of the possibility of having been fabricated through deliberate collusion or of agreeing without deliberate de-

li-'l-Jamī', 1980, p. 61-62.

(33)See the brief discussion of this statement of Ibn Ḥanbal by Adnān Zarzūr in his edition of Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣūli 'l-tafsīr*, Kuwait: Dār al-Qurān al-Karīm, 1971, p. 59, footnote 2.

(34)The printed text of *MSB* 4: 117, has "*'an shuyūkhi 'l-ākhar* " which is clearly an error. The correct version - "*an ghayr shuyūkhi 'l-ākhar*" - is given by Ibn Abd al-Hādī in the *Risālah laṭīfah*, p. 61.

(35)Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣūli 'l-tafsīr* (edited by Jamīl Affandī al-Shaṭṭī), Damascus: Dār al-Āthār al-Waṭaniyyah, 1936, (hereafter *MUT*), p. 15-16; also *Muqaddimat al-tafsīr*, (hereafter *MT*), in *MFR* 13: 346-348. This passage also begins with the quotation from Ibn Ḥanbal.

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sign, then they are indubitably sound [*kānat ṣaḥīḥatan qaṭan*]... If the Ḥadīth has been transmitted by two or more chains and it is known that the transmitters did not collude in its fabrication, and it is also known that such reports could not agree with each other by chance and without deliberate design, then it becomes known that the Ḥadīth is sound [*ṣaḥīḥ*]. For example, if someone narrates an incident which has taken place and mentions details about what was said and done, and someone else of whom it is known that he did not collude with the first person narrates similar details, then it becomes certain that this incident is true as a whole [*ḥaqqun fi 'l-jumlah*] since if each one of them was falsifying it either deliberately or accidentally, it would not ordinarily happen that they both provide details on which two people would not ordinarily agree without collusion... If someone narrates a long Ḥadīth with all sorts of things in it, and someone else relates another like it, then either he will have colluded with him on it or taken it from him, or the Ḥadīth will be trustworthy. In this way, we can known the veracity of the general content of reports which have been transmitted by several different chains [*ṣidqu 'āmmati mā ta'addadat jihātu-hu al-mukhtalifah*], even where one chain on its own is insufficient, either because its projection back to a *ṣaḥābī* is in doubt [*li-irsāli-hi*] or because of a weak transmitter [*li-ḍafi nāqili-hi*]. The exact words and precise details [*al-alfāẓ wa 'l-daqā'iq*] of such reports which are not established [*la tulamu*] by this method are not settled [lā tuḍbaṭu]; rather that requires another method by which these exact words and precise details may be confirmed [*yuthbatu bi-hā*].([36]) Thus

(36)I have followed the text of al-Shaṭṭī's edition: "*lākinna mithla hādhā lā tuḍbaṭu bi-hi 'l-alfāẓu wa 'l-daqā'iqu 'l-latī lā tulamu bi-hādhihi 'l-ṭarīqi bal yaḥtāju dhālika ila ṭarīqin yuthbatu bi-hā mithlu tilka 'l-alfāẓu wa 'l-daqā'iq*"; which is also that of Zarzūr's edition, and of the following: *Muqaddimah fī uṣūli 'l-tafsīr*, Cairo: al-Maṭbaah al-Salafiyyah, 1965, p. 25; *Muqaddimah fī uṣūli 'l-tafsīr* (edited by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Maḥmūd Naṣṣār), Cairo: Maktabat al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1988, p. 73; and, with a commentary by Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-Uthaymin, *Sharḥ muqaddimati 'l-tafsīr*, Riyad: Dār al-Waṭan, 1995, p. 68-77. The text of *MT/MFR* 13: 348 reads: "*lākinna mithla hādhā lā tuḍbaṭu bi-hi 'l-alfāẓu wa 'l-daqā'iqu 'l-latī lā tu'lamu bi-hādhihi 'l- ṭarīqi bal lā yaḥtāju dhālika ila ṭarīqin yuthbatu bi-hā mithlu tilka 'l- alfāẓu wa 'l-daqā'iq*"; which would mean: "The exact words and precise details of such reports, which are not established by this method, are not settled; *rather such reports do not require* a method by which these exact words and precise details may be confirmed". The two texts are not necessarily contradictory since what Ibn Taymiyyah is essentially saying is that one does not accept all the details in these reports (see below). The text in *Muqaddimah fī uṣūli 'l-tafsīr* (edited by Abū Hudhayfah Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad), Tanta: Dār al-Ṣaḥābah li-'l-Turāth, 1988, p. 80; and *Muqaddimah fī uṣūli 'l-tafsīr* (edited by Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarlī), Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1994, p. 56 - "*la tuḍbaṭu bi-hi 'l-alfāẓu wa 'l-daqā'iq" 'l-latī tulamu bi-hādhihi 'l-ṭarīqi bal yaḥtāju dhālika ila ṭarīqin...*" - appears illogical and, therefore, corrupt. The English translation of this passage in Muhammad 'Abdul

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> it is established by recurrent testimony [*bi-'l-tawātur*] that the Battle of Badr took place and that it took place before the Battle of Uḥud. Indeed, it is known categorically [*yulamu qatan*] that Ḥamzah, 'Alī and 'Ubaydah fought 'Utbah, Shaybah and al-Walīd and that 'Alī killed al-Walīd and that Ḥamzah killed his opponent; but there is doubt as to whether Ḥamzah's opponent was 'Utbah or Shaybah. This principle should be known because it is useful for conclusively assessing many of the reports in Ḥadīth, *tafsīr*, *maghāzī* and what is transmitted about the words and deeds of people.

While the manuals of *uṣūl al-fiqh* record that *mursal* Ḥadīths were widely accepted in the first two centuries of Islam, by Ibn Taymiyyah's day there was a variety of attitudes towards *marāsīl*(37). Broadly speaking, it is safe to say that Ḥadīth scholars were less favourably disposed towards *marāsīl* than were jurists, and that Shāfi'ī jurists imposed more stringent conditions on accepting *marāsīl* than did their Ḥanafī, Mālikī and Ḥanbalī counterparts.(38) However, the fact that there was no hard and fast rule meant that even a Mālikī scholar like al- Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, who was in principle favourably disposed to *marāsīl*, rejected the Satanic verses incident on the basis of its *isnāds*.(39) The first principle stated by Ibn Taymiyyah in the passage above represents the position of those jurists who were willing to accept *marāsīl*: a *mursal* report is deemed reliable if the *tābi'ī* who transmits it is one of those whose reputation

Haq Ansari, *An Introduction to the Principles of Tafseer by Shaykh ul-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah*, Birmingham: Al-Hidaayah 1993, p. 33, is incorrect.

(37)See the Mālikī jurist, Abu 'l-Walīd Sulaymān b. Khalaf al-Bājī (d. 474/1081), *Iḥkām al-fuṣūl fī aḥkāmi 'l-uṣūl* (edited by 'Abd al-Majīd Turkī), Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986, p. 349-350; and the Ḥanafī, Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūli 'l-aḥkām*, Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī, 1967, 2:112-113.

(38)For the position of two Shāfiī Ḥadīth scholars, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), *Kitāb al-kifāyah fī 'ulūmi 'l-riwāyah*, Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāmiyyah, 1357/1938, p. 384-391; and Ibn Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 634/1237), *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāh* (edited by 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi'), Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1989, p. 210-212. For a detailed treatment of the status of *marāsīl* by a Shāfiī contemporary of Ibn Taymiyyah, see Khalīl b. Kaykaldī al-'Alā'ī (d. 761/1359), *Jāmi al-taḥṣīl fī aḥkāmi 'l-marāsīl* (edited by Ḥamdī 'Abd al-Majīd al-Salafī), Baghdad: Wizārat al-Awqāf, 1398/1978. For Ḥanbalī views, see Abū 'l-Khiṭāb al-Kalwadhānī (d. 510/1116), *al-Tamhīd fi uṣūli 'l-fiqh* (edited by Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm), Mecca: Jāmiat Umm al-Qura, 3: 130-143; and al-Qāḍī Abu Yala al-Farrā', *al-'Uddah fi uṣūli 'l-fiqh* (edited by Aḥmad b. 'Alī Sayr al-Mubārakī), Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1980. See, also, al-Āmidī, *Iḥkām* 2:112-119; an al-Bājī, *Iḥkam*, p. 349-361.

(39)Ibn Ḥajar al-Asqalānī, for one, saw al-Qāḍī Iyāḍ's position on the Satanic verses *isnāds* as inconsistent with his Ḥadīth methodology; see *Takhrīj*, p. 114.

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is unimpeachable. Even so, it was largely agreed in jurisprudence that a reliably transmitted *mursal* Ḥadīth carried only the authority of a weak (*ḍa'īf*) Ḥadīth and did not create an obligatory religious ruling (*ḥukm*).([40])

What is of direct interest here is Ibn Taymiyyah's second argument, that if an incident is reported by a number of *mursal* chains, the chains are to be viewed as reinforcing each other and the reports accepted. The operative principle here is an old one, having been proposed by al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) himself, but seems to have been falling out of favour by Ibn Taymiyyah's time.([41]) In the above texts, Ibn Taymiyyah is reviving and developing the principle and applying it specifically to *sīrah* and *tafsīr* reports, which are materials with which Hadith scholars and jurists tended not to concern themselves and which were not a primary consideration in the formulation of their methodology. Ibn Taymiyyah builds on al-Shāfi'ī's principle, firstly, by nuancing it to confirm only the general content of the reports but not their details, and, secondly, by extending its application to include the assessment of reports received from an unreliable transmitter: "In this way, we can know the veracity of the general content of reports which have been transmitted by several different chains, even when one chain on its own is insufficient, either because its projection back to a *ṣaḥabī* is in doubt or because of a weak transmitter".

Ibn Taymiyyah's point seems to be that the majority of *sīrah* and *tafsīr* reports cannot usefully be assessed by the prevalent Ḥadīth methodology which will simply reject them as *marāsīl* transmitted by unreliable *tābi'īs*. The logic of his method for assessing these reports is as follows. The unreliability of a report arises either from its having been

(40)See Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1989, p. 101; also the article on "*Mursal*" by G.H.A. Juynball in *EI2*.

(41)"[*A mursal*] is assessed by considering: Is there another *mursal* which agrees with it and which has been transmitted by someone who is accepted as a transmitter from authorities other than the authorities of the transmitter (of the first *mursal*)? If this is found to be the case, then this is a proof that fortifies the first *mursal*, although it is weaker than the first proof" (the "first proof" is that of a *mursal* supported by a *musnad*). See Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah* (edited by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir), Cairo, n.d., p. 462, paragraphs 1266-1267. The precise meaning of the passage is not quite conveyed in the translation of Majid Khadduri, *al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī's al-Risāla fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987, p. 279. Later Hadith scholars rejected this principle (see the references to al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, above) and most later jurists did not even include it in their discussions of *marāsīl*. For the rejection of the principle by a later Ḥabafī jurist, see al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām* 2: 119.

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deliberately fabricated through collusion on the part of transmitters or from inadvertent error. If there are two *mursal* chains of transmitters that have no narrators in common, then it may safely be assumed that there is no collusion. If the chains indicate no collusion, then the narratives must be compared. If the narratives are long, and similar in content and contain matching details, then these common details are seen as corroborating the reliability of the reports as a whole because it is illogical to suppose that two independent reports will agree by chance on details if those details are erroneous.([42]) This method establishes the veracity of the general content (*ḥaqq fi 'l-jumlah*) of the narratives. However, while the narratives are similar and agree in some corroborating details, they are still not identical, disagreeing in their respective wording and in other minor details (*al-alfāẓ wa 'l-daqā'iq*). There is no way to firmly establish these finer points but Ibn Taymiyyah is not troubled by this, probably because we are dealing not with legal reports from which a ruling (*ḥukm*) on legal or religious practice is to be derived, but rather with *sīrah* and *tafsīr* material where these details are not necessarily of vital significant. Thus, when dealing with *marāsīl*, Ibn Taymiyyah confirms only what is established by common or recurrent transmission (*al-tawātur*) and leaves the remaining variant details unresolved, as in the example of the narratives of the Battle of Badr.([43]) In this regard, it is important to note that Ibn Taymiyyah's criteria for what constitutes a *tawātur* transmission is very broad. Unlike the majority of jurists, he does not stipulate that a Hadith must be transmitted by a specific number of *riwayahs* in order for it to considered *mutawātir*, nor that the transmissions agree in wording. For him, if the information in question has been widely accepted as true by the early community, then the transmission is considered *mutawātir*.([44])

(42)Ibn Taymiyyah does not apply this method to short reports which, he says, may agree by chance, but only to long ones; see *MUT*, p. 15-16.
(43)Ibn Taymiyyah points out that acceptedly *ṣaḥīḥ* Ḥadīths also disagree on details: "If someone transmits a long story with all sorts of things in it, and someone else transmits it in a similar manner to the first person without having colluded with him; then the whole story cannot be an error, just as the whole story cannot be a lie. Rather, an error may enter such a transmission in some part of the story, such as is the case with the Ḥadīth about the Prophet's (Peace and Preservation be upon him!) purchase of a camel from Jābir. Anyone who contemplates its chains of transmission will know categorically that the Ḥadīth is sound [*ṣaḥīḥ*], even though the transmitters disagree over the price (of the camel)..."; see *MUT* p. 17. For references to this Ḥadīth in the canonical collections, see A.J. Wensinck, *Concordances et indices de la tradition musulmane*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1936, 1: 199.
(44)See *IḤ*, p. 98, *MFR* 18:40.

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This is so even if the reports disagree in wording but agree in meaning, in which case the transmission is deemed "*mā tawātara manā-hu*" (a transmission the meaning of which is established by common or recurrent transmission).([45])

What Ibn Taymiyyah would seem to be proposing, then, is a distinct methodology by which to assess the many *sīrah* and *tafsīr* reports carried by *mursal* chains which Ḥadīth methodology rejects as unreliable.([46]) He places these reports in a separate category and assesses them within a logic which is tacitly governed by the concept of *al-riwāyah bi-'l-ma'na* (the validity of reports which agree in meaning as distinct from those which agree in wording). In so doing, he partially relocates the Ḥadīth methodology for evaluation of reports from its usual emphasis on the chains of transmission to an examination of the content of the narratives themselves. In effect, he suggests that narratives on the same incident be validated by collating them. It would appear from the foregoing that Ibn Taymiyyah was able to accept the accounts of the Satanic verses incident as being reliably transmitted precisely because of his distinct methodology for the assessment of *mursal* reports in *sīrah* and *tafsīr*.([47]) However, the fact that Ibn Taymiyyah's methodology of Ḥadīth assessment allowed him to accept the accounts of the Satanic verses incident as soundly transmitted does not, on its own, explain why he accepted the historicity of the incident as narrated in the reports. After all, as noted earlier, numerous scholars accepted from the reports that some such incident had taken place, but interpreted the narratives in such a way as to make the incident compatible with the doctrine of *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'*, such as by saying that it was Satan or one of the Unbelievers who uttered the verses and not the Prophet. Ibn Taymiyyah's acceptance of the soundness of transmission covers only

(45)*IḤ*, p. 68, *MFR* 18:16. See the article on "*Mutawatir*" by A.J. Wensinck and W-F. Heinrichs in *EI2*.

(46)Al-'Uthaymin (*Sharḥ*, p. 77) asserts that Ibn Taymiyyah is not applying this method to *marāsīl*. This seems to me to be incorrect since the statement in extract [C], "The exact words and precise details of such reports which are not established by this method are not settled; rather that requires another method by which these exact words and precise details are confirmed", is clearly continuing the discussion of the category of reports mentioned in the preceding sentence, namely those "which have been transmitted by several different chains, even when one chain on its own is insufficient either because its projection back to a *ṣaḥābī* is in doubt or because of a weak transmitter".

(47)It should, perhaps, be mentioned that Ibn Taymiyyah, of course, did also reject numerous *sīrah* and *tafsīr* related Ḥadīth including the famous account of Satan's encounter with the Prophet in the mosque of Madinah; see *IḤ*, p. 484-5, *MFR* 18:350.

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the methodological principle involved in the argument. We now come to the doctrinal dimension, beginning with the question of *'iṣmah*.

5. 'Iṣmah (Protection)

There are two crucial aspects of Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah* which together illustrate that Ibn Taymiyyah possessed a markedly human image of the Prophets. Firstly, Ibn Taymiyyah did not understand the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets to mean that they were immune from committing sin and error; rather, he understood it as meaning that the Prophets were Protected (*ma'ṣūm*) from *remaining*, *continuing* or *persisting* in sin and error once they had committed it. In other words, while he regarded Prophets as *ma'ṣum* (Protected), he did not regard them as in any way infallible, impeccable or immune from committing sin and error. For him it was entirely acceptable that a Prophet sin; what was unacceptable was that he settle upon and continue in the sin. However, for reasons that will be explained in the section on "*Ṣidq*", below, Ibn Taymiyyah did not believe that Prophets commit major sins (*al-kabā'ir*), but only minor ones (*al-ṣaghā'ir*). Islamic doctrine is broadly agreed that persistence in a minor sin is considered a major one.([48]) As we shall see below, Ibn Taymiyyah was not unique in understanding *'iṣmah* to mean that Prophets were Protected (*ma'ṣūm*), not from committing sin and error, but from persisting in them. However, to the best of my knowledge, the existence of this particular concept of *'iṣmah* has not been noted in the modern scholarship. The second crucial aspect about Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding of *'iṣmah* is that, even though he did not say so directly, he applied the concept of *'iṣmah* as Protection from remaining in sin and error consistently to all spheres of Prophetic activity, whether in matters related or unrelated to the transmission of Divine Revelation.([49]) Thus, in discussing *'iṣmah*

(48)For an early statement of this well-known principle, see al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 234/857), *al-Tawbah* (edited by 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā), Cairo: Dar al-Iṣlāḥ, 1977, p. 56. See also Zayn al-Dīn 'Umar b. Ibrāhīm Ibn Nujaym al-Miṣrī (d. 970/1563) with a commentary by the author's grandson, *Sharḥ risālati 'l-ṣaghā'ir wa 'l-kabā'ir* (edited by Khalīl Mayyis), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1981 , p. 78-79; and A.J. Wensinck, "*Khaṭī'ah*", *EI2*.

(49)I am not aware that these two crucial aspects of Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah* have previously been identified. In his classic study, Henri Laoust mistakenly relates Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah* to that of the Shīah: "It is thus to the Shīī doctrine of infallibility that it is appropriate to relate the doctrines of Ibn Taymiyyah who, while he refuses to admit, with al-Ṭūsī and al-Ḥillī, this *'iṣmah* as an obligatory grace from God, concedes to them the importance, against al-Rāzī, of proclaiming the total infallibility and impeccability of Prophets"; see Henri Laoust,

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in matters unrelated to the transmission of revelation, Ibn Taymiyyah writes:

> [D] And as for Protection [*al-'iṣmah*] in regard to matters which are not related to the communication of Divine Revelation, people disagree over whether this is established through reason or through transmission; and they disagree over whether the Protection is from major and minor sins or from some of these; or whether the Protection only applies to being settled upon and continued in sins [*fi 'l-iqrār 'ala 'l-dhunūbi*] and not to committing them [*fili-hā*]; or is it that there is no Protection except in the transmission of revelation; and does Protection from major and minor sins apply before a Messenger is Commissioned or not... The position taken by most people and which is in agreement with the reports transmitted from the early Muslims is *to confirm absolute Protection from being settled upon and continued in (a state of) sin* [*al-'iṣmah min al-iqrāri 'ala 'l-dhunūbi muṭlaqan*] and to reject those who deem it permissible for them to be continued in sin. The arguments of those who believe in Protection, when properly understood, support this position while the arguments of those who deny Protection do not show a single instance of the Prophets having been settled upon or continued in a sin which was committed [*wuqū dhanbin uqirra 'alay-hi al-anbiyā'*].([50])

There is a marked similarity between the *'iṣmah* described above, where a Prophet is not settled upon or continued in sin, and Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the Satanic verses incident in extract [A] from the *Kalām 'ala dawat Dhī 'l-Nūn*, in which the Prophet is pre-

Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taḳī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimiya, Cairo: L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1939, p. 188-195, quotation at p. 191. Wilferd Madelung is nearer the mark when he observes that Ibn Taymiyyah "stressed the *'iṣma* of the prophets in respect to their transmission of the revelation, but did not include immunity from sins", but this statement is also misleading; see Madelung "*Isma*", p. 183. A more accurate but very incomplete description of Ibn Taymiyyah's position is given by Serajul Haque who observes that "he is against the accepted doctrine of the sinlessness (*iṣma*) of the Prophets... and also against the creed of the Muslim community that Prophet Muhammad (ṣ) was impeccable"; see Serajul Haque, *Imam Ibn Taimiya and his Projects of Reform*, Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1982, p. 30. The closest approximation of Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah* so far has been given by Binyamin Abrahamov who correctly notes that Ibn Taymiyyah did not regard Prophets as immune from sin, and that he believed Prophets did not "commit sins persistently"; see Binyamin Abrahamov, "Ibn Taymiya and the doctrine of 'iṣmah", *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute for Islamic Studies*, 12: 3/4 (1993), p. 21-30, at p. 26. However, Abrahamov too does not accurately identify what Ibn Taymiyyah meant by *'iṣmah*; see the discussion of his article in footnote 62, below.

(50) *KDN/MFC* 2: 283, *KDN/MFR* 10: 292-293.

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sented as erring in the transmission of Revelation but subsequently not settling upon the error. Indeed, it is apparent from his statements elsewhere that Ibn Taymiyyah applied the same concept of *'iṣmah* in regard to Revelation as in other matters: "The Protection [*al-'iṣmah*] that is agreed upon by the community is that the Prophet will not be settled upon an error in the transmission of Revelation [*lā yuqarru 'ala khaṭa'in fi 'l-tablīgh*]".(51)

Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding of *'iṣmah* represented a subtle but significant reconfiguration of the established Hanbali position which was to contrast *'iṣmah* in transmission of Revelation with the lack of *'iṣmah* in matters unrelated to Revelation, this with the qualification that Prophets did not continue in sin and error after committing it. This was stated by al-Qāḍī Abū Ya'la Ibn al-Farrā' (d. 458/1066): "Our Prophet (God's Peace and Preservation be upon him!) was Protected [*ma'ṣūm*] in regard to that which he transmitted from God (the Exalted!) as were the rest of the Prophets, but Prophets are not Protected [*lam yakūnu ma'ṣumīn*] from mistakes, lapses, inadvertent error, forgetfulness and committing minor sins, but they are not settled upon [*lā yuqarrūna 'ala*] the mistake or lapse or minor sin".(52) Clearly, for Ibn al-Farra', *'iṣmah* meant immunity from transgression as he expressly says that Prophets were not *ma'ṣūm* in regard to minor sins *even though they did not continue in them.* The same concept of 'iṣmah was prescribed by Ibn Taymiyyah's Hanbalī contemporary, Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān al-Baghdādī (d. 695/1296).(53) Where Ibn Taymiyyah varied this doctrine was, firstly, by conceiving of the Prophets' non- continuance in sin as itself being the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets; and secondly, by applying that principle to all matters whether Revelation-related or not, including the Satanic verses. Thus, for Ibn Taymiyyah, just as a Prophet may sin in matters unrelated to transmission of Revelation but does not persist in that sin, so may he err in the transmission of Revelation but does not persist in the error. In both instances, the Prophet is *maṣūm*: Protected, not from committing sin or error, but from settling upon and persisting in it once he has committed it.

(51)*MS* 2: 321; see also *MFR* 15: 191: "There is no doubt that he is Protected from settling on and continuing in an error in the transmission of Revelation"; and the various references scattered through this article.
(52)Al-Qāḍī Abū Yala Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Ibn al-Farrā' al-Ḥanbalī al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-mutamad fī uṣūli 'l-dīn* (edited by Wadī' Zaydān Ḥaddād), Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1976, p. 247.
(53)Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān, *Nihāyat al-mubtadi'īn fī uṣūli 'l-dīn*, MS London, British Museum, Or.11581, f.18b.

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Ibn Taymiyyah's argument effectively posits a single consistent notion of *'iṣmah* that applies "across-the-board", so to speak, thereby cutting through the various debates on the extent and purview of *'iṣmah* noted earlier, including the two-tier notin mentioned above.(54) Since Ibn Taymiyyah viewed *'iṣmah* as non-persistence in sin and error, he was able simultaneously to accept the notion of Prophetic transgression, of which there were numerous examples in the early literature, and yet to protect the Prophet and the community from the effect of the transgression. To the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence to suggest that any Ḥanbalī prior to Ibn Taymiyyah shared his concept of across-the-board *'iṣmah* or his position on the Satanic verses.(55) Given their relatively relaxed criteria for Ḥadīth validation, Ḥanbalīs such as Ibn 'Aqīl and Ibn al-Jawzī were not in a position to easily reject the Satanic verses on grounds of weak transmission, and had hence employed *ta'wīl* to reconcile the narratives with their doctrine of *'iṣmah*.

Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah* and its specific application to the Satanic verses incident was certainly not without precedent. A similar concept of the Prophet being Protected "across-the-board" from continuing in sin and error had been held in the centuries before him by several Shāfi'ī Ash'arī scholars from Khurāsān and Transoxania. Representative of these is the Marwazī Quran commentator Abū 'l-Muẓaffar Manṣūr b. Muḥammad al-Samānī (d. 489/1096) who remarked on the Satanic verses incident: "If it is said: How is such a thing allowable for the Prophet when he was Protected?... Most of the *salaf* say: Even though this was a great error [*wa in kāna ghalaṭan 'aẓīman*], it is allowable that Prophets err; however, they are not settled upon and continued in the error [*la yuqarruna 'alay-hi*]".(56) A notion of post-erratum *'iṣmah* strongly resembling that of Ibn Taymiyyah was applied by the famous Mutazilī scholar, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1142), in his commentary on Quran 22 : 52 : "..." Satan cast into *umniyyati-hi*" - that is, that which he desired - meaning: Satan put into the Prophet's mind

(54)It is probably the fact that Ibn Taymiyyah regarded Prophets as *ma'ṣūm* across-the-board that lead Laoust, who understood *'iṣmah* as infallibility, to mistakenly believe that Ibn Taymiyyah, like the Shiah, believed in the absolute infallibility of Prophets.

(55)The same concept of *'iṣmah* as protection from persistence in error was applied by Ibn Taymiyyah to the *ijtihād* of the Prophets; see *MFR* 15 : 189- 190. On this point, his position was in common with that of most Sunnī jurists, including the Ḥanbalis. See al-Āmidī, *Iḥkām* 4:187-88; also Eric Chaumont, " La problématique classique de l'*ijtihād* du prophète: *ijtihād, waḥy* et *'iṣma*", *Studia Islamica* 75 (1992), p. 105-139, especially p. 128-133.

(56)Al-Sam'ānī, *Tafsīr al-qurān*, MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, Tafsīr 136, f. 84b.

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something through which he might express his desire [*waswasa ilay-hi bi- mā shayyaa-hā bi-hi*]; and his tongue got ahead (of him) in advertent error [*sabaqa lisānu-hu fī sabīli 'l-sahw wa 'l-ghalaṭ*], such that he said: "Indeed! They are the high-flying cranes! And, indeed, their intercession is hoped for!"... and he did not grasp what he had done [*lam yafṭan-hu*] until Protection came to him [*hatta adrakat-hu 'l-'iṣmah*] and he realized what had happened [*fa-tanabbaha 'alay-hi*]".(57) This concept of *'iṣmah* as the post-erratum Protection of the Prophets from settling upon and persisting in sin, as opposed to the infallibility or immunity of the Prophets from committing sin, seems to have been a significant doctrinal principle which was in fairly wide circulation in Islamic thought in the period 300-600H.

6. Tawbah (Repentance)

By Ibn Taymiyyah's time, however, the proportion of scholars who were interpreting the Satanic verses incident within this concept of *'iṣmah* was diminishing. With the incident rapidly assuming the status of an anathema, if a scholar was going to accept its historicity, he had to produce an argument that responded to the theological objections that were being levelled with increasing force against the incident. We now come to Ibn Taymiyyah's response to these doctrinal arguments. The objections to the incident that Ibn Taymiyyah had to address are essentially extensions of the arguments raised against the idea that Prophets may sin. The first two of these affect the issue of the Prophet's personal conduct. One is the argument that the sins of the Prophet would nullify his status as the perfect model personality. The second is the claim that any significant sin or error on the part of a Prophet would cause people to be repelled by him, and thus by his message; for a Prophet to cause people to be repelled from his message is clearly incompatible with his mission as Messenger of God. The third argument, specific to the Satanic verses, addresses the question of infallibility in the transmission of Revelation: accepting the historicity of the incident would call into question the reliability and integrity of the Prophet's transmission of the entire Quran.

In the next extract, Ibn Taymiyyah addresses the first two objections to Prophetic transgression mentioned above. He is not here discussing the Satanic verses but rather the sin and error of the Prophets in matters unrelated to Revelation. The parallels with the discussion

(57)See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3: 37.

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on the Satanic verses in extract [A] will, however, be self-evident and will both help to illustrate his idea of "across-the-board *'iṣmah*" and to bring us to the next element in Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the Satanic verses: repentance.

> [E] Now those who believe in Protection argue that it is laid down upon us by *sharīah* [*mashrū'*] to model ourselves on the Prophets and that this cannot be done if it is allowed that their actions may be sinful.([58]) But it is understood that we are required to model ourselves on them only in regard to that which they are settled upon and continued in [*fī-mā uqirrū 'alay-hi*], as distinct from that from which they are told to refrain [*nuhū 'an-hu*] and from which they recant [*rajaū 'an-hu*]; just as is the case with the prescription and prohibition of acts [*al-amr wa al-nahī*] were obedience is required only in regard to what has not been abrogated, while those prescriptions and prohibitions that have been abrogated may not be regarded as things that we were ordered to do or prohibited from doing; never mind our being required to follow or obey them.
>
> Similarly, with regard to the argument that sins contradict Completeness [*al-kamāl*], or that the sins of one upon whom great Divine Blessing has been bestowed [*man 'aẓumat 'alay-hi 'l-ni'mah*] are especially repugnant, or that the sin of such an individual causes people to be repelled [*al-tanfīr*] and other such rational arguments: All of this only applies if he remains in sin [*maa al-baqā'*] and does not recant; if he does recant, the act of sincere repentance which God accepts raises up the penitent and makes his greater [*a'ẓam*] yet than he was before. As some of the early Muslims have said: "David (Peace be upon him!) was better after repentance than he had been before error"; while others said: "If repentance was not so dear to God, He would not have tried with sin the noblest of his Creation". The Ḥadīth of Repentance to God has been confirmed in the canonical collections: "God is more pleased by the repentance of one of his worshippers than is a man who returns to his house (and finds there his lost camel, loaded with all his earthly possessions").([59]) God has said: "Indeed, God loves those who repent

(58)Both published texts are here corrupt. *KDN/MFC* 2: 283 has "*wa dhālika lā yajūzu illā min tajwīzi kawni 'l-af'āli dhunūban*", which the editor recognizes as illogical and amends to "*ghayra dhunūbin*". *KDN/MFR* 10: 293 has "*wa dhālika lā yajūzu illā maa tajwīzi kawni 'l-afāli dhunūban*". Clearly, the preposition "*illā*" should not be there; if it is removed, the statement makes perfect sense.

(59)As the editor of the *MFC* has noted, none of the recorded versions of this Ḥadīth correspond exactly to what is a paraphrase on Ibn Taymiyyah's part. For a more complete citation of the Ḥadīth by Ibn Taymiyyah see *RT/JR* 1: 225. For the references to this Ḥadīth in the canonical collections see Wensinck, *Concordances*, 1: 284.

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[*al-tawwābīn*] and purify themselves [*al-mutaṭahhirīn*]! "([60])."([61])

For Ibn Taymiyyah, then, a Prophet may sin; but having sinned, he will invariably repent. This act of repentance not only eliminates the detrimental effect of the sin, but also renders the penitent Prophet better than he was before he sinned and repented. The parallel between this argument and that made in regard to the Satanic verses is clear enough. Here, the Prophet's admission of sin and repentance from it renders him "greater yet than he was before"; while in the instance of the Satanic verses, the Prophet's admission of error and retraction of it is greater proof of his purposing after Truth [*i'timādi-hi li-'l-ṣidq*] and thus of his worthiness as a Prophet. There is also a clear parallel between the way in which it is incumbent on the Muslim, on the one hand, to disregard those acts from which a Prophet repented, taking as his model only that in which a Prophet persisted; and, on the other, to disregard those Divine Revelations and Prophetic commandments that were abrogated. These parallels will be taken up below, where it will be demonstrated that, for Ibn Taymiyyah, *'iṣmah* consists precisely in the Divine guarantee that Prophets invariably repent of their transgressions, and are thereby Protected from persisting in them.([62])

(60)Quran 2: 222.

(61)See *KDN/MFC* 2: 283-284 and *KDN/MFR* 10: 293-294.

(62)In his brief article, Binyamin Abrahamov has presented a close approximation of Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah* and has identified and discussed a number of the elements in Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding of *'iṣmah* and *tawbah* which are elaborated in this section of the present study. He has footnoted Ibn Taymiyyah's definition of *'iṣmah* - *"wa 'iṣmatu-hum hiya min an yuqarrū 'ala 'l-dhunūb wa 'l-khaṭa"* (incorrectly vocalized by Abrahamov as "*yuqirrū*") - but without translating what this formula means; Abrahamov, "Ibn Taymiya", p. 30, footnote 51. He has correctly noted that Ibn Taymiyyah's "denial of some elements of this doctrine [*'iṣmah*] resulted in a shift of focus of veneration from Muhammad's impeccability to his repentance (*tawbah*)" (p. 21); and also that "prophets neither commit sins persistently nor leave a sin without repentance" (p. 26). However, in as much as Abrahamov relates the *tawbah* of the Prophets not to their *'iṣmah* but only to their "Perfection", he has not integrated these elements into an accurate statement of Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah*. Abrahamov's apparent understanding is that, to Ibn Taymiyyah, the term *'iṣmah* means immunity, and that Ibn Taymiyyah clearly does not believe that Prophets are immune/infallible/*ma'ṣūm*, except in transmission of Revelation. Rather, they sin and repent and thus attain Perfection (Abrahamov, p. 25-26). The present study demonstrates that, for Ibn Taymiyyah, *'iṣmah* does not mean immunity, rather, it means Protection from persistence; and it is precisely the Prophet's assured repentance from sin and error across-the-board that constitutes his *'iṣmah* (Protection) from persistence in them. Finally, I have found no evidence for Abrahamov's assertion that "Ibn Taymiyyah clearly believes that by insisting on the infallibility of prophets or imams or saints one denies God His attributes"

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The arguments in extract [E], above, clearly turn on Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of repentance (*tawbah*) which, as we shall see, constitutes a pivotal spiritual in his credo, not just of Prophetology, but of Islam as a whole. In all Islamic creeds, a fundamental element in the Believer's consciousness of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) and of his worshipping God and God alone is his constant turning from false desires to ask forgiveness from God (*istighfār*).(63) Ibn Taymiyyah begins from the standard position that *tawbah* and *istighfār* are instruments by which the Believer strengthens and completes his devotion to God: "Among the benefits of repentance from sins is that it completes the devotion of the Believer [*yukammilu 'ubūdiyyat al-'abd*] and increases his fear of and devotion to God, such that the worth of the individual is elevated by God through his repentance [*fa-yarfa'u 'llāhu bi-dhālika darajata-hu*]".(64) Ibn Taymiyyah states repeatedly in his writings that there is no stigma attached to the individual who sins and repents: "Whoever thinks that the sinner who has sincerely repented of his sin is still stigmatized [*yakūnu nāqiṣan*] is utterly wrong. For nothing of the censure and punishment that are attached to sinners remain attached to the penitent as long as he is quick to repent. If he is slow to repent, he may receive censure and punishment appropriate to the delay between sin and repentance. The Prophets (God's Peace and Preservation be upon them!) were not slow to repent, rather they hastened to repentance".(65) In fact, the person who has sinned and repented may be better than the person who has not sinned at all:

> [F] The individual who has known Evil and tasted it, and has then known Good and tasted it: his knowledge of Good and love of it and his knowledge of Evil and hatred of it may be more complete than

(p. 25). The passages that Abrahamov cites in this regard are directed by Ibn Taymiyyah against the Shī ī veneration of the Imāms and the Ṣūfī veneration of saints, one element of which is the attribution to them of *'iṣmah*. The reason for Ibn Taymiyyah's objection to the attribution of *'iṣmah* to the saints and Imāms is, as we shall see, that he regards *'iṣmah* as the exclusive preserve of the Prophets. In any case, there would appear to be no plausible theological basis for a Muslim theologian to object to the idea that God may confer infallibility on a Prophet or any other individual: God may do as He will; the question is whether there is any evidence to suggest that He actually did so. The reason that Ibn Taymiyyah does not regard Prophets as infallible or immune is because the accounts in the Quran and the *salafī* tradition make it clear, to his mind at least, that they were not.

(63)See *KDN/MFC* 2: 268 ff., *KDN/MFR* 2: 262 ff.

(64)*MS* 2: 333-334. Ibn Taymiyyah is also careful to point out, however, that he is not encouraging anyone to sin so as to reap the benefits of repentance; see *MS* 2: 313.

(65)*KDN/MFC* 2: 292, *KDN/MFR* 10: 309.

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> that of the individual who has not known and tasted Good and Evil as has the first person. Rather, the individual who has only known Good may be confronted by Evil and not realize it is Evil, and he may fall victim to it and may not reject it as will the person who has known it([66])... The person who has repented of Unbelief [*kufr*] and sins may be of greater worth [*afḍal*] than the person who has never fallen into Unbelief and sins; and if he may be of greater worth, why then, the one who is of greater worth is more suited to Prophethood [*aḥaqqu bi-'l-nubuwwah*] than another who is not his equal in worth.([67])

Thus , for Ibn Taymiyyah, *tawbah* serves the same pivotal function in regard to the sins of the Prophets as it does for the sins of ordinary Believers:

> [G] He (the Exalted! To Him be all praise!) has not mentioned an instance of a Prophet sinning without mentioning along with it his repentance, so as to free him of deficiency and flaws and to make it clear that his stature has been elevated, his worth increased and his good deeds multiplied; and that God has drawn him nearer to Him by looking favourably upon his seeking forgiveness from God [*istighfār*] and his repentance and subsequent good deeds, so that this may be a model [*li-yakūna dhālika uswatan*] for those who follow the Prophets and take them as their examples until the Day of Judgement.([68])

In his writings, Ibn Taymiyyah cites numerous instances of Prophetic sin and repentance([69]) and rejects the various interpretations of Quran 48: 2 - "So that God may forgive you your sins, past and future"; addressed by God to the Prophet Muḥammad - which suggest that the sins in question are other than Muḥammad's.([70]) He rejects the argument that sin mars the *kamāl* of the Prophets, a concept usually translated as Perfection but, probably better understood as Completeness:

(66)*KDN/MFC* 2: 287, *KDN/MFR* 10: 301-302. Ibn Taymiyyah goes on to add that he is not suggesting that it is necessarily the case that every sinner who has repented is better than every individual who has never sinned, or that the greater the sins a person repents from, the necessarily more fortified his faith.

(67)*KDN/MFC*: 286-287, *KDN/MFR* 10: 310. That this applies equally to the sins of Prophets before and after their call to Prophethood is clear from the context which is a discussion of the sins of Yūnus that led to his internment in the whale: "It is well-known that his being cast into the sea took place after he had become a Prophet", *KDN/MFC* 2: 286, *KDN/MFR* 10: 309.

(68)*MS* 2: 232; see also *KDC/MFC* 2: 285, *KDN/MFR* 10: 296, *MFR* 15: 148.

(69)See Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Tawbah wa 'l-istighfār* (edited by Muḥammad 'Umar al-Ḥājī and Abd Allāh Badrān), Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1994, (hereafter *TI*), p. 39-40; *RT/JR* 1: 220-223, *KDN/MFC* 2: 279-281, 285, *KDN/MFR* 10: 285-289, 296, and many other places.

(70)See *KDN/MFC* 2: 292-293, *KDN/MFR* 10: 311-312, *TI*p. 47.

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> [H] The majority of Muslims hold that the Prophet must be pious and God-fearing [*min ahli 'l-birr wa 'l-taqwa*] and distinguished by the characteristics of Completeness [*muttaṣif bi-ṣifāti 'l-kamal*], and the necessary fact of occasional sins accompanied by repentance [*wujūb ba'ḍi 'l- dhunūbi aḥyānan ma'a 'l-tawbah*] , which wipes out (sin) and elevates the Prophet's worth such that he is better than he was before, does not negate those characteristics [*lā yunāfī dhālika*].([71])

For Ibn Taymiyyah, *kamāl* is not an inherent state but one that a Prophet constantly strives to attain and maintain:

> [I] Completeness is reckoned at the end, not on the basis of what happens in the beginning, just as "Deeds are reckoned by their outcomes [*al-a'māl bi-khawātīmi-hā*]".([72]) God (the Exalted!) created the human being and brought him out his mother's womb in a state of ignorance. Then He taught him and brought him from the state of deficiency to a state of completeness [*kamāl*], so the worth of a human being cannot be reckoned on the basis of what he was before he attained completeness, rather it is reckoned when his is complete. Similarly, it is at the final stage that Yūnus and the other Prophets (God's Peace and Preservation be upon them!) are in the most Complete state([73])... And if it is known that Completeness is reckoned at the end, and that this Completeness is attained through repentance and seeking forgiveness from God [*hādhā 'l-kamāl inna-mā yaḥṣalu bi-'l-tawbati wa 'l-istighfār*], then([74]) there is no course of action for each and every Believer but to repent: repentance is incumbent upon them all, the first and the last.([75])

Tawbah, then, is a means by which Prophets progressively attain and maintain Completeness.([76]) At one point, Ibn Taymiyyah says: "*Tawbah* is not a deficiency [*naqṣ*]; it is one of the finest aspects of Completeness [*afḍal al-kamālāt*]".([77]) In identifying *tawbah* as instrumental to the Prophet's progressive attainment of *kamāl*, Ibn Taymiyyah seems clearly to be drawing on Ṣūfī thought. It is well-known that Ibn Taymiyyah was strongly influenced by the great Ḥanbalī Ṣūfī 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 561/1166). It is thus instructive to note that a similar expression of the role of *tawbah* in the spiritual evolution of the Prophet

(71)*MS* 2: 311.
(72)For references to this *ṣaḥīḥ* Ḥadīth, see Wensinck, *Concordances* 2: 10.
(73)*KDN/MFC* 2: 286-287, *KDN/MFR* 10: 299; see also *MS* 2: 338-339.
(74)Reading "*fa-lā budda*" for "*wa lā budda*".
(75)*KDN/MFC* 2: 292, *KDN/MFR* 10: 310.
(76)See Abrahamov, "Ibn Taymiya", p. 25-26.
(77)See *TI*, p. 39.

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is found in al-Jīlānī's *Futūḥ al-ghayb*, a work on which Ibn Taymiyyah wrote a commentary:

> [J] "He (God's Peace and Preservation be upon him!) would be transported from one state of being [*ḥālah*] to another and made to traverse the stations of Divine proximity [*al-qurb*] and the planes of the unseen. The robes of light were changed upon him (as he progressed) so that at each new stage the previous one would appear dark, deficient and inadequate in the observance of guidelines. Thus he was habituated to seek forgiveness, because that is the best state for a worshipper; and to repent at every stage, because repentance involves his acknowledgment of his sin and his deficiencies. Sins and deficiencies are characteristics of the worshipper at every stage and were inherited by the Chosen One [*al-Muṣṭafa*] (God's Peace and Preservation be upon him!) from Adam, the father of humankind (Peace be upon him!)".([78])

It is thus unsurprising that Ibn Taymiyyah does not see the sins of the Prophets as undermining their status as model personalities. Rather, the very act of the Prophet's repentance from sin serves as a model of conduct for all Believers:

> [K] God (the Exalted!) has related to us the stories of the repentance of the Prophets so that we may model ourselves upon them in repentance [*li-naqtadiya bi-him fī 'l-matāb*]. And as for what He (the Glorified!) states: that we take them as a model in regard to those acts which they are settled upon and continued in [*uqirrū 'alay-hā*], meaning that they have not been told to desist from them [*fa-lam yunhū 'an-hā*] and have not then repented of them: this is the *sharī'ah* [*fa-hādhā huwa 'l-mashrū'*]. That from which they are told to desist and of which they then repent is no different from [*laysa bi-dūn*] those of their acts which have been abrogated.([79])

All of extracts [E], [F], [G], [H], [I], [J] and [K], above, refer to the issue of Prophetic repentance from sin. However, Ibn Taymiyyah sees the Satanic verses incident as an instance not of sin (*dhanb, ithm*) but

(78)See Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī with the commentary of Ibn Taymiyyah, *Sharḥ futūḥ al-ghayb* (edited by Ḥasan al-Salājī Suwayrān), Damascus: Dār al-Qādirī, 1995, p. 51-52. Cf. the translation of Muhtar Holland, *Revelations of the Unseen*, Houston: al-Baz Publishing, 1992, p. 22. Ibn Taymiyyah's Ṣūfism and his particular attachment to Abd al-Qādir has been documented by George Makdisi, "The Ḥanbalī School and Sufism", *Boletin de la Asociacion Española de Orientalistas* 15 (1979), p. 115-126, especially p. 121 ff.

(79)*MFR* 15: 180. See also the last sentence of the extract from *MS* 2: 322, above. See also Serajul Haque, *Imām Ibn Taimiya*, p. 136: "Ibn Taimiya believes that the Prophets were human beings and were liable to errors which bore significance in teaching men how to retrieve their errors".

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of error (*khaṭa', ghalaṭ* - see extracts [L], [Q] and [R], below) which, strictly speaking, does not necessitate repentance but rather acknowledgement, regret, seeking forgiveness from God (*istighfār* and a return to right conduct.([80]) In what follows, it will be seen that Ibn Taymiyyah draws a direct parallel between the process of Prophetic return from error to right conduct and the process of Prophetic repentance from sin. The acknowledgement, regret and retraction of error is, for Ibn Taymiyyah, a process that is tantamount to repentance from sin. In extract [M], below, we find that he speaks explicitly of repentance from both sin and error. From this point on, therefore, we will use the phrase "repentance from transgression" to connote both repentance from sin and regret of error. In the following passage from the *Minhāj al-sunnah*, Ibn Taymiyyah makes it clear that, for him, the Satanic verses incident constituted the pre-eminent instance of Prophetic repentance from transgression. Here, Ibn Taymiyyah is addressing the Shīī argument that Prophets cannot sin because their sin will result in people being repelled (*al-tanfīr*, from their Divine mission. Ibn Taymiyyah's response is to argue that Prophets repent of their sins and that this repentance does not cause *tanfīr*.([81])

> [L] It is known that (the Prophets') repentance and seeking refuge in God does not necessitate repulsion [*tanfīr*] or preclude trustworthiness... Among the things that demonstrate this is that we know of no-one who called into question the Prophethood of any one of the Prophets or attacked his trustworthiness as a result of anything to do with those words or deeds [*nuṣūṣ*] of which he repented. So there is no need for the Muslims to interpret these texts by what is effectively a form of distortion of them... The Torah contains some examples of this and I do not know of the Banū Isrā'īl having attacked any of their Prophets because of their having repented of anything... Moses killed the Egyptian before Prophethood ; and, after Prophethood, he repented from asking to behold (God),([82]) as well from other things, but I do not know of any of the Banū Isrā'īl having attacked him because of anything like this. And what happened in Sūrat al-Najm when he

(80)Error is distinguished from sin by the absence of knowledge of the sinfulness of the act and thus an absence of intent (*ta'ammud*) to sin. However, an error, being an act of negligence, is nonetheless blameworthy, and may even be deemed sinful if the act in question is one the sinfulness of which any reasonable individual should be aware: "Sin is conditional upon its knowability [*sharṭ al-ithm bi-manzilati 'l-tamakkun min ma'rifati-hi*]" ; *RT/JR* 1:246. Should the perpetrator come to have retrospective knowledge of his error, he should regret it and seek forgiveness from God [*al-istighfār*]. Cf. J. Schacht, "*Khaṭa'*", *EI2*.
(81)See Abrahamov, "Ibn Taymiya", p. 26.
(82)The reference is to Quran 7 : 143.

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(Muḥammad) said, "Those high- flying cranes! Indeed, their intercession is hoped for" - it being well-known among the early and later Muslims that he said this, and that God then abrogated and nullified it: this account is one of the greatest fabrications according to those (who interpret texts by what is effectively a distortion of them), for which reason many people deem it untrue even if they are prepared to accept other such incidents, whether before Prophethood or after, because they think that this implies that there was an error in the transmission of Revelation when there is complete agreement that the Prophet was Protected from error in transmission of Revelation. But the Protection that is agreed upon by consensus is that he is not settled upon and continued in [*lā yuqarru ala*] an error in the transmission of Revelation. Thus we do not know of a single Unbeliever who was repelled [*nuffira*] by the Prophet's recanting these words [*bi-rujū'i-hi an hādhā*] and saying: "This was something cast by Satan". Rather, it is related that they were repelled when he went back to censuring their deities after they thought he would praise them. So their being repelled was a result of his continuing to censure the deities, not because he said something and then said "Satan cast it". And if this did not cause repulsion, then nothing else will have done.([83])

For Ibn Taymiyyah, then, the Satanic verses incident constituted the prime example of the process of Prophetic transgression and subsequent repentance. For him, this incident, more than any other, proves that there is no basis for objecting to the idea of a Prophet who is susceptible to sin and error. The incident establishes conclusively that the inevitable repentance of a Prophet from his transgression will mean that people will not be repelled by the sin or error: "If this did not cause repulsion then nothing else will have done".([84]) "Unreliability and repulsion result from persistence [*al-ikthār wa 'l-iṣrār*] in sin", he says , not from sins from which the sinner repents.([85])

It is clear from the foregoing that Ibn Taymiyyah held a markedly human image of the Prophets. Thus, while the growing view among the scholars of his time was that Prophets should not sin because their

(83)*MS* 2: 320-21.
(84)One would imagine that Ibn Taymiyyah's opponents might argue that while the repentance of a Prophet may not produce *tanfīr*, the sin that preceded the repentance would. Although Ibn Taymiyyah does not directly address this obvious criticism of his position, he would very likely have rebutted it by arguing that the person who is swift to repentance is not stigmatized by his sin and that Prophets are invariably swift to repent. We have already seen him invoke the axiomatic Ḥadīth, "Deeds are judged by their outcomes"; (see extract [I] above).
(85)*MS* 2: 319.

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sins would vitiate their model state of *kamāl*, for Ibn Taymiyyah they were Complete models not in that they did not sin but precisely in their unfailing repentance from and thus non-persistence in their sins. As with this concept of *'iṣmah*, Ibn Taymiyyah was certainly not the first to posit the idea that Prophets repent from sin, nor to suggest that the repentance of Prophets functions as a model for the Muslims.([86]) Ibn Taymiyyah seems to have been somewhat unusual, however, in the centrality of the idea of *tawbah* to his understanding of *'iṣmah* and *nubuwwah*. In the passages quoted above, there seems to be an unstated functional relationship between the *tawbah* of the Prophets and their *'iṣmah*. We have seen that while, in his definition, the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets is their Protection from continuance or persistence in sin and error, *tawbah* is the instrument by which they turn away from sin and error. Ibn Taymiyyah says: "Sin does not harm the sinner if he repents from it, and those who allow that Prophets commit minor sins say that they are Protected from being continued in them [*min al-iqrār 'alayhā*]".([87]) Just as *'iṣmah* is by definition the Prophets' Protection from continuance in sin and error, repentance is by definition valid only with non-persistence in sin and error: "Repentance and persistence are mutually exclusive" [*al-tawbah wa 'l-iṣrār ḍiḍḍan*]".([88]) In the following passage from the *Risālah fī 'l-tawbah*, Ibn Taymiyyah lays out the relationship between *'iṣmah, tawbah* and the Satanic verses incident. The *tawbah* of the Prophets is the instrument through which their *'iṣmah* is effected, and the Satanic verses incident is the pre-eminent illustration of this relationship between repentance and Protection:

> [M] The early Muslims and their great scholars and those who follow them are agreed on what God has said in his Book, and what has been soundly transmitted from the Prophet about His accepting the repentance of the Prophets (Peace be upon them!) from the sins of which they repented. God elevates their worth through this repentance for "Indeed! God loves those who repent and those who purify themselves". Their Protection is from their being settled upon and continued in sins and error, for while those who are not Prophets may sin and err without repentance, God corrects the Prophets (Peace be upon them!) [*yastadriku-humu 'llāhu*], induces them to repent and accepts their repentance [*yatūbu 'alay-him*]([89]) and makes matters clear

(86)See, again, al- Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawbah*, p. 45; and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Sharḥ*, p. 52. See also Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghaazālī (d. 505/1111), *Iḥyā' 'ulūmi 'l-dīn*, Cairo: Dār Jam'iyyat al-Jihād al-Islāmī, 1357/1938, 12: 19-21.
(87)*MS* 2: 314.
(88)See *TI*, p. 51; also *KDN/MFC* 2: 296, *KDN/MFR* 10: 319.
(89)The verb, *tāba 'ala*, carries both the meanings of "to induce someone to re-

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> to them [*yubayyinu la-hum*]. As God says: "We have not sent before you a Prophet or a Messenger but that when he recited/desired, Satan cast something into his recitation, but God annuls that which Satan casts and then establishes his Signs clearly - and God is All-Knowing, All-Wise - to make what Satan casts a trial for those in whose hearts is sickness and those hearts are hardened, for indeed the wrong-doers are in far dissension".([90])

Ibn Taymiyyah's image of Prophets, then, was that they were profoundly human figures who, like other human beings, were susceptible to transgressions, overcoming them through repentance. However, what distinguishes the Prophets from other Believers is that while others may or not repent of their transgressions, Prophets invariably do.([91]) "There are people", says Ibn Taymiyyah, "who, when they sin seek forgiveness from God and repent, and who, when they err, realize the Truth [*tabayyana la-hu al-ḥaqqu*] and return to it; but this is not a necessary condition [*laysa hādhā wājiban*] for anyone beside a Messenger of God".([92]) For Ibn Taymiyyah, then, the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets is the guarantee, exclusive to them alone, that they will acknowledge their transgression and repent. While a Prophet, like any other individual, may realize the fact of his sin or error on his own, what distinguishes him from other people is that if he does not realize that he has transgressed, God will intervene and make him aware of it (*yastadriku-humu 'llāhu*), thereby inducing him to repent (*yatūbu 'alay-him*). In this way, the Prophet is Protected from persisting in sin and error, and it is precisely this *'iṣmah* that was evidenced by the Satanic verses incident.

7. Prophethood and Ṣidq (Veracity)

Ibn Taymiyyah does not, however, directly address the crucial question of what it is that guarantees the Prophets'repentance, and thereby their *'iṣmah*. After all, the mere fact of someone being made aware of his sin or error, even by Divine intervention, does not necessarily guarantee that he will acknowledge the transgression and repent of it. Clearly, Prophets must be possessed of a distinct quality that prompts them to acknowledge and repent when they are made aware of their trans-

pent" and "to acceptance someone's repentance". In the present context, I see it as carrying both meanings.

(90)*RT/JR* 1 : 269.

(91)See Abrahamov, "Ibn Taymiya", p. 26.

(92)*RT/JR* 1 : 266.

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gression. In what follows, I will argue that this final decisive quality which induces Prophets to invariably repent and through which their *'iṣmah* is effected is, for Ibn Taymiyyah, a human quality internal to the Prophets, namely their Veracity (*ṣidq*). This is significant in Islamic thought because, when taken to mean God's Protection of the Prophets from committing transgressions, *'iṣmah* is usually understood as a grace (*luṭf*) bestowed by God and "not a natural quality of prophets".(93) It would appear that Ibn Taymiyyah understood God's Protection of the Prophets as being effected not only by Divine correction, but by the combination of Divine correction and the Prophet's own natural quality (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) of Veracity.

We should begin by noting that while Ibn Taymiyyah regarded Prophets as "the best of Creation",(94) chosen by God and distinguished by Him with special qualities,(95) he does not seem to have characterised these Prophetic qualities as anything more than piety (*al-birr*), God-fearingness (*al-taqwa*) and veracity (*al-ṣidq*). Since these attributes are possessed in varying measure by all Believers, what distinguishes Prophets is the uncommon degree to which they possess these common qualities. The uncommon degree to which they possess these qualities is what would appear to constitute their Completeness. For all Muslim theologians, the primary attribute of a Prophet is Veracity (*ṣidq*) which for Ibn Taymiyyah is a defining quality.(96) The *ṣidq* of the Prophets is by definition more Complete than that of other humans. Ibn Taymiyyah describes Prophets as being in a state of constant striving for and purposing Veracity (*al-taḥarrī li-'l-ṣidq, al- i'timād li-'l-ṣidq*)(97) or, negatively, as not purposing Falsehood (*ṣādiqun la yata'ammadu 'l-kidhba*).(98) It is for this reason that, while Ibn Taymiyyah agreed with the majority of Muslim theologians that Prophets did not commit such sins as would vitiate their status as Prophets, to him this meant precisely that they did not do anything that would vitiate their basic nature of *ṣidq*. These transgressions he took to be major sins (*al-kabā'ir*), abominations (*al-fawāḥish*) and lying (*al-kidhb*): "God has not mentioned an instance of a Prophet committing a major sin [*kabīrah*] let alone

(93)See Madelung, "*'Iṣma*".
(94)*MS* 2: 338.
(95)*MS* 2: 327.
(96)See extract [N], below, where he likens it to the "essential quality" - "*jawhar*" - of gold.
(97)See extract [A], above.
(98)See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Sharḥ al-'aqīdah al-Iṣfahāniyyah*, (hereafter *SAI*), separately paginated in *MFC* 5, p. 131; also *MS* 2: 336.

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an abomination [*fāḥishah*]... There are different categories of sin and it is known that it is not allowable that they commit every category. It is utterly unallowable that they lie because lying negates the state of absolute Veracity [*muṭlaq al-ṣidq*]".([99]) Thus, someone who commits a major sin simply cannot be a True Prophet because a major sin cannot reasonably be committed by someone whose nature is Completely given over to Truth.([100]) Minor sins and error, however, are not incompatible with Veracity but, while a Prophet may commit lesser sins, he does not persist in them since, as was noted earlier, persistence in a minor sin constituted a major one. The reason he does not persist in sin is that his nature of Complete Veracity swiftly brings him to repent, to turn from Falsehood to Truth.

Needless to say, God chooses as his Messengers only persons possessed of this quality of Complete *ṣidq*.([101]) Indeed, the way in which we are able to distinguish a true Prophet from a false one is precisely by the manifestations of his *ṣidq*. Ibn Taymiyyah agrees with all Muslim theologians that the *ṣidq* of a Prophet is known through miracles which are unique to Prophets, but argues that it is also known by other means that are common to all persons, first among them the conduct of the individual in times of trial:

> [N] The Veracious and Truthful Prophet's transmissions from the Unseen are found to be true and consistent, and as his transmissions increase, his Veracity becomes more apparent... and the more he is scoured through direct contact and put to the test [*kullu-mā zādat mubāsharatu-hu wa imtiḥānu-hu*], the more his Veracity becomes apparent; like the pure gold which, the more it is polished the more its essential quality [*jawharu-hu*] becomes apparent - and unlike the false [*al-maghshūsh*] which, in the moment of trial [*ind al-miḥnah*] is revealed, it becoming known that what is within is different to what is without. It is for this reason that, in past claims to Prophethood, no False Prophet [*al-kadhdhāb*] succeeded for more than a brief time... (but) was uncovered.([102])

The Satanic verses incident was just such a test by which the *ṣidq* of the Prophet became known. While Ibn Taymiyyah does not explicitly

(99)*MS* 2 : 336.
(100)It should be noted that Ibn Taymiyyah nowhere states that Prophets were *ma'ṣūm* from committing *kabā'ir* and *fawāḥish* or from lying, only that they had not in fact committed these offences. As far as *'iṣmah* in major sins is concerned, Prophets are Protected, again, only from persistence; see *TI*, p. 39 and *MS* 1 : 331.
(101)*JṢ* 2 : 37.
(102)*SAI*, p. 130.

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call the incident a test, he clearly regarded it as such.([103]) He makes it clear that the Prophet had the choice between concealing his error and thus persisting in it, or acknowledging it and turning away from it; and that the fact that he accepted Divine correction and acknowledged his error was evidence of nothing other than his *ṣidq*. In other words, it was precisely his quality of Veracity which lead him to accept Divine correction, to regret and acknowledge his error, and turn from Falsehood to Truth:

> [O] When he said of his own volition [*an nafsi-hi*] that the second and abrogating command was from God and that the thing that was being removed and abrogated by God was not from God, this is an even greater proof of his purposing Veracity [*i'timādi-hi li-'l-ṣidq*] and of his speaking the truth [*qawli-hi 'l-ḥaqqa*]". This is similar to what 'Ā'ishah (may God be pleased with her!) said: "If the Prophet had wanted to conceal any part of the Revelation, he would have concealed this verse. So the Prophet's proclaiming that God had established his *āyāt* and removed that which Satan cast is a yet greater proof of his striving for Veracity [*taharri-hi li-'l-ṣidq*] and his innocence from lying. It is this that achieves the purpose of Messengership [*hādhā huwa 'l-maqṣūd bi-'l-risālah*], for indeed he is the Truthful, the Veracious."([104])

This is an appropriate juncture at which to summarize what has been learned thus far about Ibn Taymiyyah's doctrinal argument. For Ibn Taymiyyah, the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets is their Protection, not from committing sin or error, but from continuing or persisting in it after it has been committed. The instrument by which Prophets, like other Believers, overcome transgression and turn from Falsehood to Truth is repentance. What distinguishes the Prophets from other Believers is that while others may or may not repent of their transgressions, Prophets invariably do. This guarantee of the Prophets' repentance from transgressions is their *'iṣmah*. In order to repent, a person must first be aware of his transgression. In the case of Prophets, God will intervene to inform a Prophet of his transgression if he does not realize it himself. However, for the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets to be effected, it still remains for the Prophet to accept God's correction of him and repent. The quality that induces the Prophet to unfailingly acknowledge his error and repent is his *ṣidq*, his complete commitment to Truth. Thus,

(103)The incident was interpreted in this way by many scholars, beginning at least at early as the 3rd/9th century; see Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl āyi 'l-qurān*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988, 17: 191.
(104)*KDN/MFC* 2: 283, *KDN/MFR* 10: 292, see Extract [A], above.

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the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets is the combination of Divine intervention and the Prophetic quality of Veracity.

Unless we are alert to Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding of the relationship between *ṣidq* and *'iṣmah*, it is all too easy to misconstrue a passage such as the following:

> [P] If a person is Veracious when he says, "I am the Messenger of God", he will be Protected in that which he transmits from God, and he may not lie in any part of it whether deliberately or by mistake... If it is allowable that a Prophet transmit from God what was not said to him and that then becomes lodged in the Revelation, and the people take it from him believing that God said it when He did not say it, this would contradict the purpose of Messengership [*maqṣūd al-risālah*], and he would not be the Messenger of God in that, but rather he would be a liar in that even if he did not intend to do it... The person whose Veracity has been established by categorical proofs [*barāhīn*] and signs [*āyāt*]: it is not possible that there be in his transmission from God any element of Falsehood (*al-kidhb*), whether deliberate or accidental.([105])

The crucial phrase in this passage is, of course: "and that then becomes lodged in the Revelation". Error is not incompatible with striving after Truth, but if one strives Completely after Truth one does not persist in error. As long as a Prophet is *ṣādiq*, error cannot come to be lodged in Revelation because the Prophet, when corrected by God, will turn from Falsehood to Truth, repent of his transgression and proclaim the correction. This process is a trial which will emphasise his Veracity:

> [Q] "Can an error [*al-ghalaṭ*] take place which God then corrects and explains so that the purpose of Messengership is not nullified, as is reported about the uttering of, "Indeed, they are the high-flying cranes! ..."?... Those who allow this say that if things were made clear and God abrogated that which Satan cast, there is no danger [*lā maḥdhūra fī-hi*]; rather this proves his Veracity and Reliability and Faithfulness and that he does not follow his individual desire and does not persist in anything that is other than Truth... and if there is no problem [*lā maḥdhūra*] in God's abrogating what He reveals, then still less should there be a problem with an abrogation such as this. God indicates this by Saying: "We have not sent before you a Messenger or a Prophet..." ...The Veracity which is established by the miracles of the Prophets and their proofs is that a Prophet's communication of Revelation from God is in accordance with what is communicated to him, and that

(105) *JṢ* 2: 33-34; for another such passage see Ibn Taymiyyah's *Kitāb al-nubuwwāt*, Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Munīriyyah, 1346/1927, p. 166-167.

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> he will not contradict it whether willingly or accidentally [*an yakūna khabaru-hu 'an Allāhi muṭābiqan li-mukhbari-hi lā yukhālifu-hu 'amdan wa la khaṭ'an*].([106])

Ibn Taymiyyah dismisses as irrelevant to the issue of *ṣidq* the Mu'tazilī argument that if someone transmits information believing it to be true, then even if the information is false it cannot be considered a lie, as well as the argument that an error does not result in sin.([107]) While both these arguments might be helpfully employed by someone seeking to affirm the historicity of the Satanic verses without untoward theological consequences, they are irrelevant when *ṣidq* is understood as the quality of complete commitment to Truth which produces the True end result. On the same basis, Ibn Taymiyyah also gives short shrift to the assertion that the Satanic verses incident casts doubt on the integrity of the Prophet's transmission of the Quran as a whole:

> [R] If God removed what Satan cast and established his own *āyāt*, there is no danger in the matter [*la maḥdhūra fī-hi*]. It is only an error or mistake in transmission of Revelation if he is settled upon and continued in it [*illā idhā uqirru 'alay-hi*]... Those who deny that anything was cast into his transmission of Divine Revelation run from this concept; and while they mean well, the response to them is: "It was cast, then it was fixed, so there is no problem here! [*ulqiya thumma uḥkima fa-lā maḥdhūra fī dhālika*]". For the person who is familiar with prescriptions and prohibitions, this resembles abrogation [*al-naskh*]. If the Prophet is certain of the removal of an utterance that came hastily upon this tongue, there is nothing greater than his proclaiming its removal".([108])

8. Naskh

This brings us to the final dimension of Ibn Taymiyyah's argument, namely the question of *naskh*. It was seen in extract [A] from the *Kalām 'ala da'wat Dhī 'l-Nūn* that Ibn Taymiyyah draws a parallel, which to the best of my knowledge is unprecedented, between the Prophet's repenting of and correcting a sin or an error and God's revealing a Quranic verse which abrogates an earlier Revelation. This parallel also appears in extract [K] from the *Minhāj al-sunnah*: "That from which they are told to desist and of which they then repent is no different

(106)*JŞ* 2: 35-36.
(107)*JŞ* 2:36.
(108)*MFR* 15: 191-192.

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from [*laysa bi-dūn*] those of their acts which have been abrogated" ; and again in the *Risālah fī 'l-tawbah* : "We are obliged to follow that which is settled upon [*mā istaqarra alay-hi al-amr*], and as for the abrogated [*al-mansūkh*], that from which they have been told to desist and that which has been repented of [*al-matūb min-hu*], it is agreed that these contain no normative model".([109]) In drawing this parallel, Ibn Taymiyyah is not claiming that *naskh* and *tawbah* are the same phenomenon. His argument seems to be twofold : firstly, that both *tawbah* and *naskh* are legitimate processes which produce the same effect, namely that of the Prophet's communicating a change in a previously established Quranic verse or Prophetic example of religious praxis ; and, secondly, that the two processes can overlap as the Prophet's *tawbah* may be consequent upon Divine *naskh*.

Ibn Taymiyyah identifies two types of *naskh* : the abrogation by God through Divine Revelation of an earlier Divine Revelation ; and "the second category of *naskh* [*al-naw' al-ākhar min al-naskh*]", of which the Satanic verses incident is an instance (see extract [A]), namely "the removal of that which Satan cast ; not the removal [*raf'*] of that which God laid down".([110]) In the first instance, God cancels a previous Revelation by sending down a new Revelation that supercedes it ; in the second He sends a Revelation to cancel out something that Satan has managed to insinuate into Revelation through Prophetic error. Similarly, in *tawbah* in matters unrelated to Revelation, a Prophet cancels out an earlier normative act by repenting of it, establishing thereby a new normative act. *Naskh* and *tawbah* overlap in the instance of the second type of *naskh*. God's *naskh* of Satanic interpolation is also His correction of Prophetic error and the True Prophet, when corrected, acknowledges his error, repents of it and proclaims it. Ibn Taymiyyah actually argues that the abrogation by God of an earlier piece of Divine Revelation (the first category of *naskh*) is more likely to produce *tanfīr* (repulsion) than is *tawbah*, as people are more likely to be accept the idea of the abrogation of Falsehood by Truth than that of one Truth replacing another. He illustrates this with the example of the change of the *qiblah* from Jerusalem to Mecca.([111])

Both *tawbah* and *naskh* are processes which determine whether or

(109)*RT/JR* 1 : 276 ; see also *MFR* 15 : 148, where Ibn Taymiyyah rebuts al-Qāḍī 'Iyād.

(110)See Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Iklīl fi 'l-mutashābih wa 'l-ta'wīl*, Cairo : Maktabat Anṣār al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah, 1366/1948 (2nd edition), p. 5.

(111)*MS* 2 : 322, 324.

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not a Prophet settles upon and continues in an act (*al-iqrār*), and thus whether or not that act is to be followed. As such, in a very literal sense, the concept of *naskh* represents the Divine application of the logic of the axiomatic Ḥadīth which we have seen Ibn Taymiyyah invoke in regard to the sin and repentance of the Prophet and which informs the entirety of his argument on the Satanic verses: "Deeds are measured by their outcomes". The outcome in the present case is simple enough: "It was cast, then it was fixed, so there is no problem here!" The idea that the *sunnah* of the Prophet consists only of those words and deeds which he settles upon and persists in is, of course, a standard principle in Islamic jurisprudence.([112]) So, once more, what is unique here is not the concept itself, but rather Ibn Taymiyyah's explicit application of it to the Satanic verses incident. It is important to note that Ibn Taymiyyah's recognition of the Satanic verses incident in no way affected his belief in the normative authority of the Prophet's *sunnah*. He was clearly at pains to make sure no-one misunderstood the implications of his interpretation of the Satanic verses: he took the extremely unusual step of beginning a work on *'ulūm al-ḥadīth* with a reference to the incident saying that no matter whether one accepted that the Prophet uttered the verses or not, since the final result was that God abrogated them, the normative status of the Prophet's *sunnah* remains unaffected.([113])

9. The meaning of " tamanna " in Quran 22: 52 and other issues

We may thus sum up Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the Satanic verses incident as follows: the incident as narrated in the reliable reports is the single best illustration of the way in which a Prophet who strives after Truth (is *ṣādiq*) and is hence Protected (*ma'ṣūm*) from persisting in error and sin (*min al-iqrār 'ala 'l-khaṭa' wa 'l-dhanb*), transgresses, is corrected, and repents of his sin or proclaims his error, which process confirms his qualities as a Prophet and preserves the integrity of Divine Revelation. Given the importance of the Sata-

(112)For a Ḥanbalī statement of this principle, see al-Ḥasan b. Shihāb al-Ukbarī (d. 428/1037), *Risālah fī uṣūli 'l-fiqh* (edited by Muwaffaq b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Qādir), Mecca: al-Maktabah al-Malikiyyah, 1992, 59-61.

(113)*IḤ*, p. 54, *MFR* 18:7. Since virtually all Ḥadīth scholars regarded the Satanic verses incident as false, I know of no other author who found it necessary to even mention the incident in a work on *ulūm al-ḥadīth*, never mind to consider its possible implications for the status of the *sunnah*.

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nic verses to Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding of *'iṣmah, tawbah, ṣidq* and *naskh*, it is unsurprising that he forcefully rejects the various interpretations of the Satanic verses incident, and of other accounts of Prophetic transgression, in which the narratives are refigured in such as way as to bring them into line with the orthodox concept of *ismah*: "Their interpretations [*ta'wīlātu-hum*], to those who analyze them, are clearly corrupt and of the category of distortion of what is said from its clear sense [*taḥrīfi 'l-kalim an mawāḍii-hi*]".(114)

Ibn Taymiyyah's analysis of the Satanic verses incident, such as I have been able to piece it together from the partial commentaries scattered through his writings, still leaves some obvious issues untreated.

While Ibn Taymiyyah states that he accepts the *riwāyahs* on the incident transmitted by the early Muslims, he does not cite or quote from any of them. This is important because the narrative content of the early *riwāyahs* is far from homogenous. Most of these differences are at the level of detail which, as we have seen in our discussion of Ibn Taymiyyah's Ḥadīth methodology, he did not necessarily regard as crucial in *tafsīr* reports. But a clearly significant difference is the fact that some reports state that Satan was able to influence the Prophet to utter the verses as a result of his desire to conciliate Quraysh, implying that the Prophet's own erroneous desire precipitated the incident, while others merely say that the Prophet uttered the verses absent-mindedly. Since Ibn Taymiyyah does not cite or quote from any of the *riwāyahs* or describe the incident himself (beyond saying that is was the occasion on which the Prophet uttered the Satanic verses), we cannot tell which opinion he is following. This important narrative difference is directly related to the choice of the two available meanings, "to desire" and "to recite", that the early commentators accord to the verb "*tamanna*" and its derived noun "*umniyyah*" in Quran 22 : 52. The *riwāyahs* that present the incident as arising from the Prophet's desire read Quran 22 : 52 as follows : "We have not sent before you a Prophet or a Messenger but that when he desired [*tamanna*], Satan cast something into his recitation/desire [*umniyyah*]...". The *riwayahs* which do not attribute the incident to the Prophet's desire take the verse as : "We have not sent before you a Prophet or a Messenger but that when he recited [*tamanna*], Satan cast something into his recitation [*umniyyah*]...". At

(114)*KDN/MFC* 2 : 293 and *KDN/MFR* 10 : 314 ; see also *MS* 2 : 314, 342, *TI* p. 46, *RT/JR* 1 : 269. For a study of Ibn Taymiyyah's attitude to *ta'wīl* see Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Julaynid, *al-Imām Ibn Taymiyyah wa mawqifu-hu min al-ta'wīl*, Cairo : al-Azhar, 1973.

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the time when these reports were put into circulation, it appears that the issue was not whether or not the Prophet recited the Satanic verses - it being largely agreed by the transmitters that he did - but rather what had caused him to do so, for which reason what mattered was not the meaning of "*umniyyah*" in Quran 22: 52 but rather that of "*tamanna*". By Ibn Taymiyyah's time, the question was whether the Prophet had recited the verses at all, as a result of which the meaning of "*umniyyah*" became crucial. Those who rejected the *riwayahs* outright (as distinct from those who refigured the narratives through *ta'wīl*) took "*umniyyah*" to mean desire, which allowed for Quran 22: 52 to be interpreted as meaning that which Satan cast was no more than a suggestion insinuated by him into the Prophet's thoughts but upon which the Prophet did not act and from which no utterance issued. We have seen that Ibn Taymiyyah invoked Quran 22: 53 - "to make that which Satan cast a trial for those in whose hearts there is sickness..." - to argue that no trial of the Unbelievers could result from something that the Prophet merely thought and did not say or do. It is for this reason that Ibn Taymiyyah strongly favours the "recitation" meaning, as it unambiguously indicates that the thing cast was audible to the Unbelievers. However, he is willing to accept "desire" if the "desire" results in speech: "All of this could not result from something that was merely within the Prophet's heart and to which the Prophet did not give voice. But it might be that it was something in his thoughts of which he uttered a part... this would agree with what we have said".([115]) Thus, although we cannot tell which version of the incident Ibn Taymiyyah subscribed to, his understanding of the verb "*tamanna*" in Quran 22: 52 would appear to accommodate the most significant difference between the early *riwāyahs*. A second important narrative difference between the reports is that in some of them the Prophet is depicted as realizing his error and regretting it before the revelation of Quran 22: 52, while in others he does not realize that he has erred until told as much by Gabriel. On this point, there is no indication at all as to Ibn Taymiyyah's position.

A further narrative element contained in some of the *riwāyahs* which caused particular problems for later scholars was the question of the *sajdah* of Quraysh along with the Muslims at the end of the Prophet's recitation of Sūrat al-Najm. That Unbelievers of Quraysh did indeed, on one occasion, prostrate themselves alongside the Muslims at the end of Sūrat al-Najm is confirmed in Ḥadīth contained in the canoni-

(115)*MFR* 15: 190-91.

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cal collections. The difficulty for the later scholars lay in three points. Firstly, why would Quraysh have prostrated themselves, if not because of the praise for the deities contained in the Satanic verses? Secondly, were Quraysh prostrating themselves to God or to their deities? And thirdly, on a point of religious praxis, supposing the *sajdah* of Quraysh was to God; did this mean that *wuḍū'* (ritual ablution) was not a necessary condition for *sajdah* (given that Quraysh had clearly not performed *wuḍū'*)? Ibn Taymiyyah's resolution to this problem was straightforward: there is no contradiction in the idea of Quraysh prostrating themselves to Allah since, after all, they worshipped Him as one of their deities. If the Satanic verses incident is accepted, then clearly the Prophet's praise of their goddesses encouraged them to perform *sajdah*, but the prostration was still to Allah. On this basis, the conclusion is that *sajdah* without *wuḍū'* is valid.([116])

Ibn Taymiyyah also addresses the well-known variant reading of Quran 22: 52: "We have not sent before you a Messenger or a Prophet or a *muḥaddath* but than when he desired/recited...".([117]) He holds that this reading is inadmissible since the *muḥaddath* (someone who is neither a Prophet nor a Messenger but who receives Divine communications) is not Protected from persisting in sin and error and that Satanic interpolations into the utterances of a *muḥaddath* are not necessarily removed by God. The fundamental point here is that, as we have already noted, for Ibn Taymiyyah no-one is *ma'ṣūm* except for Prophets. His pointed rejection of the "*muḥaddath*" readings fits well with his famous hostility towards the veneration of Ṣūfī saints. Many Ṣūfīs, of course, claimed *'iṣmah* for the *awliyā'* who were also deemed to receive Divine communications.([118])

(116)See *MFR* 21: 281-282, *MFC* 2: 51-52. For the problem that the *sajdah* of the Unbelievers continued to pose for scholars opposed to the incident, see Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386/1966), *Fī ẓilāli 'l-qurān*, Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq 1984 (12th edition), 6: 3420-3421.

(117)This is reported to have been the reading of Abd Allāh Ibn Abbās (d. 68/688). See Abū Dā'ūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash'ath al-Sijistānī (d. 275/889), *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985, p. 85.

(118)*MFR* 2: 52-53; see also *RT/JR* 1: 264-5, 271, *SAI*, p. 107, *al-Nubuwwāt*, p. 167. For Ibn Taymiyyah's hostility towards the veneration of saints, see Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimiya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, The Hague: Mouton, 1976.

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10. The Salaf

As we have seen, Ibn Taymiyyah repeatedly characterises his position on the Satanic verses as being in agreement with that of the majority of Muslims and with that of the early community, the *salaf*. Ibn Taymiyyah's claim to be voicing the view of the majority of Muslims must be taken with a pinch of salt, as in his day the majoritarian view was against the Satanic verses. But what is more important to his legitimization of his position is his identification with the *salaf*. That Ibn Taymiyyah regarded as the traditions of the *salaf* as authentic and authoritative is well-known. Ibn Taymiyyah's Ḥadīth methodology, discussed earlier, is an important element in his salaf-ism. His methodology of Ḥadīth assessment allows him to accept the validity of a very broad range of historical and exegetical material transmitted by the early Muslim tradition, including accounts, such as those concerning the Satanic verses, which most Hadith scholars would deem unreliable. This corpus of early historical and exegetical materials also contains much - once again, such as the accounts of the Satanic verses - that is at odds with the doctrinal systems formulated by late medieval Muslim thought, as a result of which such accounts were rejected. Ibn Taymiyyah took these problematic narratives as a part of the authentic doctrinal legacy of the *salaf*. Since these narratives do not themselves contain an explicitly stated doctrinal system, it became incumbent on Ibn Taymiyyah himself to produce such a system, in other words to reformulate the doctrines of the *salaf* as reflected in the early narrative reports. What Ibn Taymiyyah is doing, then, in identifying his ideas with those of the *salaf*, is to engage in a two-fold process of historical reclamation and reconstruction of the discourse of the *salaf* on the one hand, followed by the formulation of an epistemology that systematizes the inchoate elements in that reconstituted discourse. This post-dated systematization of *salafī* doctrine is, inevitably, elaborated through the framework of the prevailing concepts from the five subsequent centuries of Islamic thought.

Thus, while Ibn Taymiyyah accurately presents the early Muslim position on the Satanic verses as accepting the historicity of the incident, he explains this position through the integration of what, by his time, were well-established Islamic concepts, namely *'iṣmah* and *tawbah*. What he does not say is that none of the early reports on the incident present the incident in terms of either *'iṣmah* or *tawbah*, or even mention either concept in relation to the incident. Nowhere in the

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early material is the Satanic verses incident interpreted through the explicit application of the methodological and doctrinal principles by which Ibn Taymiyyah reaches his conclusions; these principles simply had not yet been articulated in the first 150 years of Islam. In effect, what Ibn Taymiyyah is doing is first to say, "This is what the *salaf* said on such-and-such an issue"; and then to say "Here is the rationale behind what they said, even if they did not say so themselves". Since Ibn Taymiyyah viewed the discourse of the *salaf* as constituting original and authoritative Islam, his sense of the need to systematize its inchoate doctrinal components from the early sources is readily understood. Naturally, this process of reconstituting *salafī* doctrines was in significant measure, like any attempt at historical reconstruction, simultaneously a process of genuine reclamation as well as a creative exercise on Ibn Taymiyyah's part.(119) Ibn Taymiyyah's reconstitution of *salafī* doctrine in interpreting the Satanic verses is remarkable for the way in which he refigures the very principle which the Satanic verses incident is seen as violating - *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'* - to accommodate not only the incident but also the numerous other instances of Prophetic sin and error in the *salafī* narratives. While Ibn Taymiyyah viewed his understanding of the incident as being in accord with views of the *salaf* and constructed an argument that was consistent with and successfully systematized the information transmitted from the *salaf*, there is no evidence that this is indeed how the *salaf* themselves understood the incident. Nonetheless, Ibn Taymiyyah plainly viewed himself as asserting an original and authentic truth against the new orthodoxy that was becoming dominant in his time.(120) As we shall see, later Muslim scholars would ascribe to the *salaf* doctrines very different from those with which Ibn Taymiyyah identified them.

11. Ibn Taymiyyah, the Satanic verses and the historical constitution of Islamic orthodoxy

We now come to the question of how Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion on the Satanic verses has been treated by other scholars in the Islamic

(119)This is not necessarily dissimilar to the present author's treatment of Ibn Taymiyyah himself.

(120)This is not the only issue on which Ibn Taymiyyah asserted the position of the *salaf* against the orthodoxy of his day. See his ideas on the question of *khalq al-qurān* in Wilferd Madelung, "The Controversy on the Creation of the Koran", in J.M. Barall (editor), *Orientalia Hispanica sive studia F.M. Pareja octogenario dicata*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984, p. 504-525, at p. 512-515.

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intellectual tradition and what this treatment tells us about the historical constitution of Islamic orthodoxy. We have noted how modern Islamic orthodoxy has categorically rejected the historicity of the Satanic verses incident. Already in Ibn Taymiyyah's day, his argument was pitched against a rising tide of opposition.([121]) While Ibn Taymiyyah's career was, of course, filled with controversy, and while he was several times tried for the alleged unorthodoxy of his beliefs, there is no indication that he was attacked by any of his contemporaries for his writings on the Satanic verses.([122]) The fact that no action seems to have been taken against him on this particular point would suggest that even though the majority of scholars of his day were rejecting the Satanic verses, affirming the incident was still not considered entirely beyond the pale of acceptable belief. However, there is no indication that any of his Damascene colleagues and students actually subscribed to his view.

In his abridgement of the *Minhāj al-sunnah*, Ibn Taymiyyah's Shāfi'ī colleague, Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), provided a summary statement of Ibn Taymiyyah's position on *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'*. In it, he presented the idea that Prophets sin and repent and are made more Complete by their repentance. He represented Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah* in *tablīgh* as follows: "They are Protected in that which they transmit and are not settled upon and continued in any inadvertent error [*sahw*] in that".([123]) As we have seen, however, the full significance of this principle in the context of Ibn Taymiyyah's thought only becomes apparent when it is applied to the hermeneutical problem of Satanic verses. This al-Dhahabī does not mention. Al-Dhahabī himself did not accept the Satanic verses incident as narrated in the early reports and cited a sanitized narrative of the incident in his biography of the Prophet in the *Ta'rīkh al-islām* in which there is no indication

(121)It is instructive to note that Ibn Taymiyyah wrote at least 2 *fatwas* in response to the question of whether the belief that Prophets committed sins constitutes *kufr*. One of these is at *MFR* 4: 319-321; the other is quoted by Khayr al-Dīn Nu'mān b. Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī al-Baghdādī (d. 1317/1899), *Jalā' al-'aynayn fi muḥākamati 'l-Aḥmadayn*, Cairo: Maṭbaat al-Madanī, 1980, p. 493-494.

(122)See Sherman A. Jackson, "Ibn Taymiyyah on Trial in Damascus", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39/1 (1994), p. 41-85. For a highly revealing study of Ibn Taymiyyah's prickly personality, see Donald P. Little, "Did Ibn Taymiyya have a screw loose?", *Studia Islamica* 61 (1975), p. 93-111.

(123)Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *al-Muntaqa min minhāji 'l-i'tidāl fī naqd kalām ahli 'l-rafḍ wa 'l-i'tizāl* (edited by Muḥibb al-Dīn al- Khaṭīb), Cairo: al-Maṭbaah al-Salafiyyah, 1973, p. 84-85.

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that Muḥammad actually uttered the Satanic verses.([124])

While Ibn Taymiyyah's most famous Ḥanbalī pupil, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), comments on Quran 22 : 52 in his writings, he nowhere refers to the Satanic verses incident. Even in a passage in the *Ighāthat al-lahfān* where he specifically invokes Quran 22 : 52 as evidence that "Satan cast into his recitation", he does not specify whether this means that the Prophet actually said something as a result of Satanic suggestion.([125]) Ibn Qayyim also avoids mention of the Satanic verses in its usual place in the narrative of Muḥammad's life.([126]) The indications would seem to be that Ibn Qayyim rejected the incident, in which case he may have felt some discomfort with Ibn Taymiyyah's views. Ibn Taymiyyah's most famous Shāfiī pupil, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/373), suspended judgement on the incident. He cited several accounts of it in his *tafsīr* with the qualifying remark : "The chains are all *mursalah* : I have not seen it in a *ṣaḥīḥ musnad* transmission, and God knows best!".([127]) In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Kathīr deliberately refrained from citing the incident "so that no one hear it who might not take it in its proper place".([128]) Ibn Kathīr's position on the incident can only be judged as ambivalent. If he had categorically rejected the incident, one would have expected him to say so when commenting on it. Although he nowhere expressly rejects the story, Ibn

(124)al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-islām wa ṭabaqāt mashāhīri 'l-a'lām, al-tarjamah al-nabawiyyah* (edited by Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ḥamdān), Cairo/Beirut : Dār al-Kitāb al Miṣrī/Dar al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1985, 2/1 : 140-141.

(125)"God has said that he has not sent a Prophet or a Messenger "...but that when he *tamanna*, Satan cast something into his *umniyyah*", and the *salaf* are all agreed that *tamanna* here means to recite (*tala*) and that when he recited Satan cast into his recitation... If this is what Satan did with the Prophets (Peace and Preservation be upon them!), then what about other people? Thus Satan sometimes causes the person reciting the Quran to err, confuses his reading and jumbles it up and causes his tongue to stumble ; or he confuses his mind and his heart [*yushawwishu alay-hi dhihna-hu wa qalba-hu*]. If Satan is present when the Quran is recited, then the reciter is not free of him whether in regard to this (confusion of the tongue) or that (confusion of the mind or heart), and Satan may even subject the reciter to both of these ; for which reason one of the most important things is to say, "I seek refuge from him with God (the Exalted!)" ; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Ighāthat al-lahfān min maṣāydi 'l-shayṭān* (edited by Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī), Cairo : Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al- Ḥalabī, 1939, p. 93.

(126)See Ibn Qayyim, *Zād al-ma'ād fī hādī khayri 'l-'ibād* (edited by Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Ṭāhā), Cairo : Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1970, 1 : 38 and 2 : 49.

(127)'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, Beirut : Dār al-Khayr, 1990, 3 : 253.

(128)Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah* (edited by Muṣṭafa 'Abd al-Wāḥid), Cairo : 'Īsa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964, 2 : 56.

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Kathīr certainly did not hold the same anti-majoritarian views on the Satanic verses as did his teacher.

While none of the above three scholars mentions Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the incident, it is explicitly and accurately cited by a Damascene Ḥanbalī scholar of the next generation, Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad Ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī (d. 803/1401), whose father, Muḥammad Ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī (d. 763/1362), was another of Ibn Taymiyyah's most prominent students. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad Ibn Mufliḥ categorically rejects Ibn Taymiyyah's position as contradicting the concept of *'iṣmah*.([129]) It is interesting to note that his source for Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion is the *Minhāj al-sunnah*.([130]) This is significant because much of the lengthy passage in the *Minhāj al-sunnah* which contains Ibn Taymiyyah's single most detailed discussion of the concept of *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'* - including his exposition of *'iṣmah* as non-persistence in sin and his discussion of the *tawbah* of the Prophets - is missing from two of three manuscripts used by Muḥammad Rashād Sālim in preparing his critical edition of the *Minhāj*, published in 1962.([131]) These missing passages (*MS* 2: 305-308, 309-311, 318-319 and 321-359, which last section begins with the discussion of the Satanic verses) are, however, present in MS Ashir Effendi 559 which was copied in 777/1376 (within 50 years of Ibn Taymiyyah's death) and is the earliest extant manuscript of the *Minhāj*. While there is no means of ascertaining whether the absence from later copies of the *Minhāj* of these substantial passages (totalling 44 pages of Sālim's edition) was the result of inadvertent scribal omission or was deliberate and expressive of the unpopularity of its contents, the fact that the absent text is not continuous would, at least, indicate that the omission was not simply the result of a quire dropping out of the original manuscript. In any case, the fact of the missing text does suggest that Ibn Taymiyyah's views on *'iṣmah* in general and on the Satanic verses in particular were

(129)See Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad Ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī, *al-Isti'ādhah*, p. 117; *Maṣā'ib al-insān*, p. 127.

(130)Ibn Mufliḥ refers to the *Minhāj al-sunnah* as *al-Radd 'ala' 'l-rāfiḍī*. The *Minhāj* was written as a polemic against the *Minhāj al-karāmah* of Ibn Taymiyyah's famous Shī'ī contemporary al-Allāmah Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726-1326), and his popularly known as *al-Radd 'ala 'l-rāfiḍī* because Ibn Taymiyyah prefaces his quotations from al-Ḥillī with the phrase "*qāla 'l-muṣannif al-rāfiḍī*". See *MS* 1: 47, as well as p. 17-33 of Sālim's introduction to the *MS* (separately paginated).

(131)See *MS* 2: 321, footnote 1. I have quoted extensively from this passage. For a discussion of the differences between the manuscripts, see Sālim's introduction to the *MS*, p. 55-71.

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less accessible to later generations of scholars than they might otherwise have been. In modern times, for example, this passage has not been available to users of the Būlāq edition of the *Minhāj* (such as Henri Laoust); this edition was prepared from later manuscripts and its discussion of *'iṣmat al-anbiyā'* is only two pages long (*MSB* 2: 82-83). Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad Ibn Mufliḥ's citation of the *Minhāj* is the only one I have been able to find in the literature.

The *Kalām 'ala da'wat Dhī 'l-Nūn* continued to be more widely available and was cited by some scholars. In the 12th/18th century, the Damascene-Nabulsī Ḥanbalī scholar Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī (d. 1188/1774), who regularly cited Ibn Taymiyyah as an authority, paraphrased from the *Kalām* in correctly presenting Ibn Taymiyyah's position on *'iṣmah* in *tablīgh*:

> [S] Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (May God rest his spirit!) said: People are agreed that Prophets are Protected regard to that which they impart from God and the Muslims are agreed that no error may come to lodge therein. But: Can something issue from them [*hal yaṣdaru min-hum*] which God then corrects, such that God removes that which Satan casts and establishes his signs clearly? There are two opinions in regard to this. He said: the opinion of the *salaf* agrees with the belief that this may happen".([132])

However, there being no explicit reference here to the *mas'alat al-gharānīq*, it may not have been apparent to al-Saffārīnī's readers from the wording of the text that it is to this incident that the passage refers. Out ot its context, the quotation does not, make explicit that Ibn Taymiyyah accepted that the Prophet uttered the Satanic verses, only that something "issued from" him. Whatever al-Saffārīnī thought of Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the incident, he gave Ibn Taymiyyah's discussion of *'iṣmah* pride of place in arranging his various citations from past authorities. To some scholars, however, Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of post-erratum *'iṣmah* does not seem to have qualified as *'iṣmah* at all. The 10th/16th century Meccan Shāfi'ī Ḥadīth authority, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 974/1566), prepared a long list of Ibn Taymiyyah's purported unorthodoxies, including an allegation that Ibn Taymiyyah believed that the Prophets were "*ghayr ma'ṣumīn*".([133]) Three hundred years later, a defence of Ibn Taymiyyah against al-Haytamī's charges

(132)Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Saffārīnī, *Lawāmi' al-anwār al-bahiyyah wa sawaṭi' al-astār al-athariyyah li-sharḥi 'l-durrah al-muḍiyyah fī 'aqdi 'l-firqah al-murḍiyyah*, Cairo: Majallat al-Manār al-Islāmiyyah, 1324/1904, 2: 291.

(133)Aḥmad Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī al-Makkī, *al-Fatāwa al-ḥadīthiyyah*, Cairo: Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1970 (2nd edition), p. 116.

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was composed by a traditional reformist scholar of Baghdād, Khayr al-Dīn Nu'mān al-Ālūsī (d. 1317/1899). Al-Ālūsī begins the chapter on the *'iṣmah* allegation by quoting al- Saffārīnī's précis of Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of *'iṣmah*, including the above passage. In al-Ālūsī's subsequent defence of Ibn Taymiyyah, he essentially argues that the position that the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets consists in their Protection from persisting in sin is a legitimate one for which he demonstrates a venerable scholarly lineage.([134]) It is uncertain however, what he thought of Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses as he does not refer to the incident in the course of his discussion. Also, several of the authorities he cites in Ibn Taymiyyah's defence were themselves strenuously opposed to the incident, among them his own father, the renowned Quran commentator Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854), himself an admirer of Ibn Taymiyyah. The senior al-Ālūsī composed one of the most detailed refutations of the historicity of the Satanic verses in which there is, however, no reference to Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation.([135]) There is nothing to suggest that the junior al-Ālūsī held a position that was different to that of his father.

A 13th/19th century Indian Ḥadīth scholar, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ghaznawī (d. 1296/1879), a member of the pro-Ibn Taymiyyah Ghaznawī school in Amritsar,([136]) quoted at length from Ibn Taymiyyah's discussion of the Satanic verses from the *Kalām 'ala da'wat Dhī 'l-Nūn* in his supercommentary on the *tafsīr* of the 9th-15th century Shāfi'ī Mu'īn al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 894/1488). Al-Ghaznawī, however, did not give his opinion of Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the incident and quoted along with it several opposing arguments.([137]) While al-Ghaznawī does not appear to have actually agreed with Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses, he seems at least not to have regarded it as beyond the pale of mentionable belief. However, the most active Indian "Taymiyy-ist", al-Ghaznawī's famous contemporary Nawāb Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān of Bhopal (d.1307/1890), made no

(134)See Khayr al-Dīn Numān al-Ālūsī, *Jalā' al-'aynayn*, p. 489-494.

(135)See Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-maānī fī tafsīri 'l-qurān*, Būlāq: al- Maṭbaah al-Kubra al-Amīriyyah, 1301/1883, 5 : 449-460.

(136)See Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, " The Impact of Ibn Taymiyya on South Asia ", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990), p.120-149, especially p.140.

(137)Muḥammad b. Abd Allāh al-Ghaznawī, supercommentary on Muīn al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥasanī al-Ḥusaynī al-Ījī al-Shāfiī, *Jāmi al-bayān fī tafsīri 'l-qurān* (edited by Munīr Aḥmad), Gujranwalah: Dār Nashr al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1976, 2 : 52-53.

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mention of Ibn Taymiyyah in his thorough refutation of the incident.(138)

One of those who took a position on the Satanic verses forcefully opposed to that of Ibn Taymiyyah was the man who, in the context of modernity, is probably the most influential of those who have identified themselves with Ibn Taymiyyah, namely Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), the founder of Wahhābism. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb interprets the narrative of the incident as meaning that Satan, not the Prophet, uttered the Satanic verses and that Quraysh "imagined that the Prophet (God's Peace and Preservation be upon him!) had uttered them". Clearly, for him, the suggestion that the Prophet might have uttered the verses is anathema:

Whoever knows this story and knows what the Unbelievers believed at that time and what they and their learned men said, and does not distinguish between the Islam which the Prophet brought and the religion of Quraysh which the Prophet was sent to warn them against and which was the greatest *shirk*: May God repel him! This story is abundantly clear, except for him whose heart and hearing have been sealed by God (*ṭaba'a Allāhu 'ala qalbi-hi wa sam'i-hi*) and whose faculty of discernment has been clouded by Him (*ja'ala 'ala baṣari-hi ghashāwatan*). There is no helping that man, *even if he be one of the wisest of men* [*wa law kāna min afhami 'l-nās*]. As God said of those people of understanding who did not comply: "We established them firmly in a manner in which We have not established you, and We created for them hearing and vision and wise hearts, but neither their hearing nor their vision nor their wise hearts benefitted them one jot...", to the end of the verse.(139)

Although no study has yet established exactly which of Ibn Taymiyyah's works Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb read, it seems unlikely that he would have been unfamiliar with Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses from at least one of the sources cited in this paper.(140)

(138)See his *Fatḥ al-bayān fī maqāṣid al-qurān* (edited by 'Abd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm al-Ansārī), Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 1992, 9:66-72. For his role in promoting Ibn Taymiyyah's ideas in India, see Nizami, " Impact ", p.139-140, 149.

(139)Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Mukhtaṣar sīrati 'l-rasūl* (edited by 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Zayd al-Rūmī *et al*), in *Mu'allafāt al-Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb*, Riyad: Jāmiat Imām Muḥammad Ibn Saūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1981, 3: 32. The *āyāh* is Quran 46: 26; the emphasis is mine. See also Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Sharḥ sittat mawāḍī min al-sīrah al-nabawiyyah* (edited by Khālid b. Abd al- Raḥmān b. Ḥamad al-Shāyi), Riyad: Dār Balansiyah, 1416/1995, p. 60-61.

(140)Wahhābī and non-Wahhābī scholars are agreed on "the dependence of the Shaykh [Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb] on the two great Hanbalite masters of the eighth/fourteenth century, Ibn Tayimiyah and Ibn Qayyim". See Michael Cook, "On

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While his reference to the "wisest of men" in the above passage may be purely rhetorical, it would seem to be an unlikely sort of reference to make in this instance unless Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb had someone significant in mind. Whether or not the phrase refers to Ibn Taymiyyah (and it is somewhat difficult to imagine Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb saying anything quite so harsh about him), it is clear that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb would have regarded Ibn Taymiyyah's position as failing to distinguish between the Islam of the Prophet and the *shirk* of Quraysh, and thus as misguided and unacceptable. In light of this, it is noteworthy that, to the best of my knowledge, no Wahhābī scholar has seen fit to cite Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion on the Satanic verses. Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the Satanic verses would seem to lie so irretrievably beyond the strictures of Wahhābī orthodoxy, that the proponents of that orthodoxy have apparently found themselves unable to acknowledge its existence.

Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion on the Satanic verses has all but vanished in the discourse of 14-15th/20th century Islam. We have already mentioned how no traditional Muslim scholar in this century has accepted the historicity of the Satanic verses and how, in this century, acceptance of the incident has been deemed a deviant belief. While Ibn Taymiyyah is by no means a universally revered figure in 14-15th/20th century Islam, he is without doubt the most important medieval thinker in the construction of the often overlapping 14-15th/20th century orthodoxies of Wahhābism, Salafism and of the various Muslim Brotherhood movements. It is thus ironic that among the most forceful 14-15th/20th century rejectionists of the Satanic verses incident are the many *Salafī*([141]) and reformist traditional scholars for whom Ibn Taymiyyah is the pre-eminent medieval authority. In light of their representation of the rejection of the Satanic verses as expressive of orthodoxy, it is instructive to note that, to the best of my knowledge, none of Ibn Taymiyyah's modern-day disciples has discussed his interpretation of the Satanic verses; this in spite of or, more accurately, because of the importance of Ibn Taymiyyah to the construction of that orthodoxy.([142])

the Origins of Wahhābism", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3/2/2 (1992), p. 191-202, (quotation at p. 199-200); and Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Abbūd, *'Aqīdat al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-salafiyyah wa atharuhā fi 'l-'ālam al-islāmī*, Madinah: Maktabat al-Ghurbā' al-Athariyyah, 1996, 1: 171.

(141)I am distinguishing here between "*salafī* ", referring to the tradition of the early Muslim community, and "Salafī", referring to the modern movements which identify themselves with *salafī* doctrines

(142)We have already noted how, in the 13th/19th century, neither of the al-Ālūsīs

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Some of the modern Salafī scholars who have actually cited Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the incident have misrepresented it. Thus the late Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, one of the most prominent Ḥadīth scholars of the 14-15th/20th century, who himself rejected the Satanic verses incident outright, somehow took the unambiguous text of the *Kalām 'ala da'wat Dhī 'l-Nūn* to mean that Ibn Taymiyyah's stand on the incident was that Satan uttered the verses and not the Prophet.([143]) The modern scholars and editors of Ibn Taymiyyah's works have been similarly reluctant to engage with his argument.([144]) One suspects that the sheer unorthodoxy - in 14-15th/20th century terms - of Ibn Taymiyyah's position makes the exposition of his interpretation of the incident an uncomfortable prospect for those traditional scholars who wish to represent Ibn Taymiyyah as a leading orthodox authority.

In fact, the only discussion of Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses which I have found in the modern Islamic literature is by a scholar who clearly does not regard Ibn Taymiyyah as orthodox at all. In a polemical work entitled *Ibn Taymiyyah laysa salafiyyan* ("Ibn Taymiyyah is not a *salafī*"), the Azharī *shaykh* Manṣūr Muḥammad 'Uwayṣ uses Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of *'ismah* in general, and of the Satanic verses in particular, as evidence in arguing that Ibn Taymiyyah is not a representative of *salafī* - that is, authentic and orthodox - Islam. 'Uwayṣ correctly cites Ibn Taymiyyah's position on *'iṣmah* in *tablīgh* as being that Prophets are immune, not from committing error in transmission of revelation, but from persisting in it. This, to him, is an unacceptable position precisely because it allows Ibn Taymiyyah to accept the Satanic verses incident. This acceptance, to 'Uwayṣ as to modern orthodoxy, inevitably implies that "the reliability of Revelation and consequently of Prophethood vanishes".([145]) For 'Uwayṣ, as

discussed Ibn Taymiyyah's position. It is also absent from the refutations of the incident written by prominent 14-15th/20th century Salafīs and traditional reformers who regularly invoked Ibn Taymiyyah, such as Muḥammad Abduh, "*Mas'alat al-gharānīq wa tafsīr al-āyāt*", al-Manār 4/3 (1 Dhū 'l-Ḥijjah 1318/3 May 1901), 81-99; Sayyid Quṭb, *Ẓilāl*, 6: 3420-3421; and Sayyid Abū al-Ala Mawdūdī (d. 1399/1979), *Sīrat-e sarvar-e ālam*, Lahore: Idārah-e Tarjumān al-Qurān, 1978, 2: 569-578.

(143)In the course of his refutation of the Satanic verses, al-Albāni cited Ibn Taymiyyah's attitude to *marāsīl* (examined above) and proposed the rejection of all *mursal* Hadith. See al-Albānī, *Naṣb al-majānīq*, p. 21-24, 34.

(144)For example, Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Faryawāī quotes Ibn Taymiyyah's position on Quran 22: 52 from the *JṢ* and *MFC* but does not discuss it, only citing al-Ibānī's rejection of the incident. See al-Faryawāī, *Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah wa juhūdu-hu fī 'l-ḥadīth wa 'ulūmi-hi*, Riyad: Dār al-Āṣimah, 1996, 2: 503-506.

(145)See Manṣūr Muḥammad Muḥammad 'Uwayṣ, *Ibn Taymiyyah laysa salafiyyan*,

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for modern orthodoxy, *'iṣmah* means immunity from committing sin and error. Having attacked Ibn Taymiyyah's position on *'iṣmah* and the Satanic verses, 'Uwayṣ says: "In claiming that he is invoking the position of the *salaf*, Ibn Taymiyyah is like a man who has a beautiful and attractive glass bottle and who puts on the bottle a piece of paper which says "rosewater". However, when he fills the bottle, he does not fill it with what the label says but rather with vinegar so that while its external appearance is attractive, its contents are horrible. Ibn Taymiyyah claims to be following the *salaf*, but in fact he is opposing them".(146)

'Uwayṣ's construction of what constitutes the original and authentic Islam of the *salaf* is radically different to Ibn Taymiyyah's: for 'Uwayṣ the *salaf*, like modern orthodox Muslims, believed that the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets was their immunity from committing sins. 'Uways's critique of Ibn Taymiyyah is a highly revealing one, and graphically demonstrates the mutability of the historical constitution of notions of orthodox belief in Islam. In the 8th/14th century, Ibn Taymiyyah tried to refute as a late elaboration the position that the Satanic verses incident did not happen because it offended against the idea of Prophetic infallibility. He attempted to restore to its proper place what he put forward as the original position of the *salaf*; that the incident did indeed take place and confirmed the idea of the Prophet's Protection from persistence in sin. Today, in the 14-15th/20th century, the doctrine that Ibn Taymiyyah had rejected as a later formulation has itself come to constitute the authentic *salafī* doctrine, and Ibn Taymiyyah's original *salafī* doctrine has become anathema. To carry 'Uwayṣ's own analogy a little further, what we have here is a case of new, or at least constantly changing, wine/rosewater/vinegar in old bottles with the same attractive label.

The predicament in which this historical process places those 14-15th/20th century *Salafīs* who take Ibn Taymiyyah as a *salafī* authority may be surmised from the unsuccessful attempt by 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Sīlī to reply to 'Uways's charges with regard to Ibn Taymiyyah's view of *'ismah*.(147) Al-Sīlī simply does not address the question of Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses, the critique of which constitutes a fundamental element in 'Uwayṣ's polemic. Rather, he glosses over the issue by saying that 'Uwayṣ concedes that Ibn Taymiyyah

Cairo: Dār al-Nahdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1970, p. 251-264; the quotation is at p. 254.

(146)'Uwayṣ, *Ibn Taymiyyah*, p. 262-263.

(147)Sayyid 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Sīlī, *al-'Aqīdah al-salafiyyah bayn al-Imām Ibn Ḥanbal wa 'l-Imām Ibn Taymiyyah*, Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1993, p. 367-368.

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considered the Prophets to be *ma'ṣūm* in *tablīgh*. Al-Sīlī thereby avoids engaging with the basic thrust of 'Uwayṣ's argument, which is precisely that Ibn Taymiyyah's notion of *'iṣmah* in *tablīgh* is an incorrect and non-*salafī* one, hence his erroneous position on the Satanic verses. To engage with 'Uwayṣ's argument would require al-Sili to engage with Ibn Taymiyyah's position on the Satanic verses, and would thus demand of him a categorical statement as to whether Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation is an accurate representation of the position of the *salaf* or not. This potentially problematic clarification is not forthcoming. Al-Sīlī preserves Ibn Taymiyyah's position as an authority for modern Salafī orthodoxy by avoiding the issue, the issue being the Satanic verses.

12. Conclusion

This study of Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the Satanic verses incident has served, on the one hand, to illustrate the remarkable synthetic originality of Ibn Taymiyyah's thought; and, on the other, to indicate the distinctly fluid and mutable nature of the historical constitution of orthodoxy in Islam. We have noted how, in the first two centuries of Islam, the Satanic verses incident constituted a standard and widespread element in the historical memory of the early Muslim community with regard to the life of its founder. This element of the early historical memory, like many others, proved problematic in the context of the systematization of Islamic doctrine between the 3rd and 6th Islamic centuries. By Ibn Taymiyyah's day, the majority of Muslim scholars were rejecting the historicity of the Satanic verses narratives on the twin bases of their weak *isnāds* and the incompatibility of the incident with the principle of Prophetic infallibility. This position of rejection of the Satanic verses was already asserting itself as orthodoxy, that is, as the only legitimate belief.

Ibn Taymiyyah, against the majoritarian opinion of the scholars of his day, accepted the historicity of the Satanic verses as something wholly consonant with Muḥammad's status and mission as the Messenger of God. He asserted that belief in the incident was the position of the early Muslims, the *salaf*, and thus the original and authentic truth. In so doing, he attempted to provide an interpretation for the incident which would explain the contents of the historical memory of the 2nd/8th century Muslim community in terms of the intellectual and doctrinal framework of the 8th/14th century Muslim community. He accepted the reliability of the *riwāyahs* narrating the incident through

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the application of his own Ḥadīth methodology in which he took a particularly accomodating view of historical and exegetical *mursal* reports. He conceived of the *'iṣmah* of the Prophets as their Protection, not from committing sin and error, but rather from persisting in them once committed. He saw this Protection as an effect of Divine correction combined with the distinguishing Prophetic quality of Veracity (*ṣidq*), which quality inevitably leads Prophets to acknowledge, regret and repent of their transgressions. The penitence of the Prophets, like that of all Believers, removes the effect of their sins and makes them more Complete (*kāmil*) individuals than they were before sin and repentance. Ibn Taymiyyah applied this concept of *'iṣmah* to all spheres of a Prophet's activity, including the transmission of Divine Revelation. When the Prophet erred in the transmission of Revelation by uttering the Satanic verses, God corrected him and removed the Satanic verses. The Prophet acknowledged his error and retracted it, just as he would regret and repent of a sin. This process confirmed his Veracity, which quality is the basis of his Prophethood, and thus underlined his faithfulness and reliability as the Messenger of God.

Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the Satanic verses derives from his own distinctive elaboration and collation of concepts of varied provenance, including a principle of Ḥadīth methodology proposed by al-Shāfi'ī; an understanding of *'iṣmah* resembling that held, in the main, by Khurasani and Transoxanian Ash'arites; and an emphasis on the pivotal role of *tawbah* found in Ṣūfī thought. His apparently original synthesis of these ideas produced a theological framework within which he presented the image of the Prophet Muḥammad as a very human being, at a time when the tendency was towards the mythologization of his personality and his elevation to a superhuman status.

While Ibn Taymiyyah's interpretation of the Satanic verses incident does not seem to have won support in his own day even among his own disciples, there is no indication that he was condemned for it by his contemporaries. The implication of this is that while rejection of the Satanic verses was, in the 8th/14th century, the majoritarian view, it had yet to succeed in asserting itself as orthodoxy. In the 14-15th/20th century, however, acceptance of the historicity of the Satanic verses, which Ibn Taymiyyah saw as crucially expressive of the beliefs of original and authentic Islam, is seen as false and deviant; while rejection of the incident, which he regarded as an erroneous late formulation, has now itself become the authentic and orthodox belief. At the same time, Ibn Taymiyyah has become one of the most important medieval

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scholars within 14-15th/20th century Sunnī discourse; probably the most important one for the Wahhābis, Salafīs, and Muslim Brotherhood movements. These groups, like Ibn Taymiyyah, assert that their interpretations of Islam are true by virtue of their being original and authentic, and regard Ibn Taymiyyah as an authority for their orthodoxy. The patent unorthodoxy, in 14-15th/20th century terms, of Ibn Taymiyyah's position on so problematic an issue as the Satanic verses is something that the leading scholars of these modern orthodox movements have, apparently, not yet found themselves able to address. What today, in the 14-15th/20th century, constitutes irrecusable orthodox doctrine was still a moot point in the 8th/14th century; and for his 14-15th/20th century disciples, Ibn Taymiyyah was on the wrong side of that debate. To the orthodoxy of Islamic modernity, the Satanic verses incident poses a fundamental problem; to Ibn Taymiyyah it was a fundamental part of the solution.

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